

**A Musical Feast - 12 December 1999, Mansfield College
Oxford**

Oxford Girls' Choir and Oxford Baroque Players
directed by Richard Vendome and Penelope Martin-Smith
with Jenny Broome (harp)



Missa Sancti Nicolae - Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

1. Kyrie (Catherine Young, soprano, Alice Armitage, alto)
2. Gloria (Lucy Steele, soprano)
3. Credo (Hannah Burnham, soprano, Clare McQuitty)
4. Sanctus
5. Benedictus (Emily Burn, Miranda Jewess, alto)
6. Agnus Dei (Natasha Peach, soprano, Hannah Tucker, alto)

During his long career, Joseph Haydn composed at least fourteen masses, the earliest dating from c.1749 (*Missa brevis*) and the last from 1802 (*Harmoniemesse*). The *Missa Sancti Nicolae* dates from 1772, the end of Haydn's intense *Sturm und Drang* period; from now on there were fewer symphonies in minor keys and no more string quartets for a decade. Perhaps Haydn was relieved to return to the more functional world of church music; in the *Missa Sancti Nicolae* we hear him at his most joyful, celebrating the name-day of his patron, Prince Nikolaus Esterházy (6th December, St Nicholas' Day). His melodic gift is apparent throughout, and nowhere more so than in the beautiful *Benedictus*; only in the *Crucifixus* do we experience a true solemnity.

Carols (training choir, directed by Penelope Martin-Smith)

1. Silent night
2. The Apple Tree (soloists: Jessica Glaisher, Kimberley Waechtler)

A Ceremony of Carols (op.28) - Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

1. Procession
2. Wolcum Yole
3. There is no rose
4. That yonge childe (Victoria Couper, solo)
5. Balulalow (Katie Birtill, solo)

6. As dew in Aprille
7. This little babe
8. Interlude
9. In freezing winter night (Hannah Fogg, Gaia Marcus, solos)
10. Spring Carol (Hannah Nye, Louisa Nye, duet)
11. Deo gratias
12. Recession

In 1939 Britten and Peter Pears joined W.H.Auden in the United States, but although he was a conscientious objector Britten decided to forsake exile and return home in the Spring of 1942. Aboard ship he composed two of his best-loved choral works, the *Hymn to Saint Cecilia* (op.27) and *A Ceremony of Carols* (op.28). The latter was conceived for female (not boys') voices and first performed by the ladies of the Fleet Street Choir in December of that year. The work opens and closes with a processional Antiphon for Christmas Vespers; other movements are based on Middle English lyrics. Simple but refined in melody and structure, dazzling in its colour and poetry, it combines voices and harp with a sureness of touch rarely heard in modern choral music. Joy and sadness, excitement and serenity, spring warmth and winter frost are all distilled herein.

- INTERVAL (15 minutes) -

G.F. Handel (1685-1759) – Dixit Dominus

1. Dixit Dominus (Catherine Young, soprano; Georgia Black, alto)
2. Virgam virtutis (Georgia Black, alto)
3. Tecum principium (Felicity Lingard, soprano)
4. Juravit Dominus
5. Secundum ordinem Melchisedech
6. Dominus a dextris tuis (Sasha Brown, Sophie Kent, sopranos)
7. Judicabit in nationibus – Conquassabit
8. De torrente in via (Charlotte Roberts, Amy Wackett, sopranos)
9. Gloria Patri – Et in saecula saeculorum

It seems hard to grasp that Handel composed this *tour de force* of pyrotechnic counterpoint in 1707, when Bach (born in the same year, 1685) had yet to produce anything remotely comparable. Handel had left his native Germany for Italy the previous year, attracted by the world of opera, and *Dixit Dominus* shows us the extent to which he had already absorbed the Italian style. We probably owe this youthful sacred masterpiece to the fact that opera itself was banned in Rome under a papal interdict at the time. This setting of Psalm 109 (110 in Protestant usage) is scored for five-part voices (SSATB) and five-part strings (2 violins, 2 violas and basso continuo). The singing parts are more instrumental than vocal in idiom, with strings sometimes doubling the voices, sometimes in dialogue with them. In 1707 Handel also wrote

settings of the psalms *Laudate pueri* and *Nisi Dominus*; the three works together may have formed a 'Carmelite Vespers' (i.e. were composed for Vespers on the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel). There is no evidence of a contemporary performance either in Italy or in England, which he visited for the first time later that year. However, some of the music reappears, in true Handelian style, in the *Utrecht Te Deum*, the Chandos Anthem no.10 and the oratorio *Deborah*.

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male voices (* = soloist)

tenor Alan Armitage*, Jerome Finnis*, Rob Harnish, John Tucker*
bass Peter Brown*, Richard Coleridge, Christopher Franks*,
Peter Kent, Paul Lewis, John Nye

Oxford Baroque Players

violin 1 Nadja Zweiner
violin 2 Jessie Murphy
viola 1 Henrietta Rigeon
viola 2 Robin Ashwell
cello Judith Dallosso
bass Rosalind Lillywhite
organ Richard Vendome
(chamber organ by William Drake)