

The Huddersfield Singers

Conductor: Daniel Gordon • Registered Charity N° 507768

Winter Concert 2017

Christmas Fantasy

with
Alan Horsey,
Organ & Piano

Marc-Antoine Charpentier
Messe de Minuit sur des Airs de Noël

John Gardner
Cantata for Christmas

Ralph Vaughan Williams
Fantasia on Christmas Carols



Featuring **Simon Pratt, Baritone**

Saturday, 2nd December, 7.30pm

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CONDUCTOR

Daniel Gordon

Daniel is the *Senior Teaching Fellow in Performance* and resident répétiteur of the University of Leeds, a combined part-time rôle which sees him coaching, examining, organising and, in most cases, accompanying hundreds of student performances every year. These include concerts at Ripon and Wakefield Cathedrals, churches, hospitals and pubs.

This work encompasses a very wide range of genres. One of his former piano pupils won a Grammy recently, and many of his graduates are successful performers in classical orchestras, choirs, musical theatre and bands.

Daniel is also *Accompanist and Assistant Chorusmaster* of Huddersfield Choral Society, and has played regularly with many other groups, including the CBSO Chorus, Black Dyke Band, Manchester Camerata and Leeds Festival Chorus. He is also delighted to be an Honorary Member of the Sheffield Philharmonic Chorus.

He has appeared as a choral répétiteur on ITV's *South Bank Show*, CBBC, and Radios 2 and 4. He was described by the Yorkshire Post as a strong soloist, following his first concerto performance with Halifax's Square Chapel Orchestra. He is choirmaster/organist of Adel Parish Church, Leeds.

A former head chorister of Westminster Abbey (where he was, amongst other things, the choir-school's silent film accompanist from the age of 10), he was an academic scholar and principal music scholar at Ardingly College. He was then an instrumental scholar at Balliol College, Oxford, where he read theoretical physics and philosophy. Daniel worked in applied geophysics and taught computing to postgraduates for several years before becoming a professional musician. He is a pupil of Darius Battiwalla.

Daniel lives in Kirkstall with his wife, Clare. They tend an allotment at Headingley Station and write on the popular *WalkHighlands* blog. If you'd like to know more, please see their website:

www.cdgordon.org.uk



TONIGHT'S GUESTS



Alan Horsey, Organ

Alan was born in the New Forest town of Fordingbridge and was educated at Bishop Wordsworth Grammar School in Salisbury and the Royal College of Music, where he studied organ, bassoon and singing. He has held appointments at Leeds Minster, St James, Muswell Hill, London and Bradford Cathedral.

From 1997 to 2015 he served to much acclaim as Conductor of Ilkley and Otley Choral Societies. He is the accompanist to the Leeds Philharmonic Society and the Overgate Hospice Choir based in Halifax. He works regularly with the Sheffield Bach Society and Doncaster Choral Society, the St Peter's Singers in Leeds, the Manchester Camerata and the Manchester Concert Orchestra. When not involved in music-making, Alan restores pipe organs with John R. Clough and Son of Bradford.

Alan is married to Elisabeth, who teaches music at a Special School in Halifax. They have two adult children who work in London.

Simon Pratt, Baritone

Simon is a final-year vocal studies student at the University of Leeds, studying under the tutelage of Austin Gunn. In his time at university, Simon has taken a huge interest in performing. Much of this has been in association with the Opera Society, where he is a regular member of the chorus. He is currently also playing the role of Figaro for their production of *The Marriage of Figaro*. His oratorio experience includes such works as Mozart's and Duruflé's *Requiems*, Haydn's *Theresienmesse* and Vaughan Williams' *Five Mystical Songs*.

During his time at university, Simon has attended masterclasses with such distinguished singers as Louise Alder and Katherine Broderick, as well as such acclaimed accompanists as Joseph Middleton.

Simon is hoping to continue to study performance at Master's level at conservatoire next year, having received offers from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama.





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For more information, please speak to a choir member or visit us online, where extensive details about the choir can be found:

<http://www.HuddersfieldSingers.com/>

PROGRAMME

Messe de Minuit sur des Airs de Noël (c. 1690) .. Marc-Antoine Charpentier

- i: Kyrie eleison
- ii: Gloria
- iii: Credo
- iv: Sanctus & Benedictus
- v: Agnus Dei

Jane Hoyle, *Soprano*
Lynne Ninkovic, *Soprano*
Pam Sykes, *Contralto*
Ben Drury, *Tenor*
Simon Pratt, *Baritone*
Alan Horsey, *Organ*

★ INTERVAL ★

Cantata for Christmas, op. 82 (1966) John Gardner

- i: Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern
- ii: An ode on the birth of our Saviour
- iii: Les anges dans nos campagnes
- iv: O magnum mysterium
- v: Puer nobis nascitur
- vi: Coventry Carol
- vii: In dulci jubilo

Catherine Styring, *Soprano*
Pam Sykes, *Contralto*
Ben Drury, *Tenor*
Simon Pratt, *Baritone*
Alan Horsey, *Piano*

Fantasia on Christmas Carols (1912) Ralph Vaughan Williams

Simon Pratt, *Baritone*
Alan Horsey, *Organ*

PROGRAMME NOTES

I welcome you to tonight's concert, and very much hope that you enjoy the music. I'm particularly grateful to Richard Hallas and the Music Committee for putting together such a lovely programme for this evening and the season, to our rehearsal accompanist, Sue Ogden, to the Singers, the guests and to everyone who works behind the scenes – and of course to you, the audience.

Charpentier: Messe de Minuit sur des Airs de Noël

Tonight we start with Charpentier's *Messe de Minuit* – a delightful baroque favourite. It is so popular that it is easy to forget how unusual it is, at least amongst the huge and diverse repertoire of choral Mass settings which we enjoy these days. Two elements come to mind as giving this piece its lightness and spark. Apparently due mainly to a particular aristocratic patron, Charpentier was introduced to Molière's troupe: he subsequently wrote music for plays as well as for the church. The other is a quirk of ecclesiastical history. For all the import and seriousness of its text, the Mass was allowed to 'let its hair down' on one very special occasion each year: midnight at Christmas.

The tradition of a Midnight Mass, or communion service, straddling Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, is still very strong in many denominations. Although it wouldn't happen in a typical Anglican church nowadays, for many centuries before Charpentier's time, Midnight Mass had included the singing of noëls. As you'll hear tonight, these are often joyful, lively songs, many with down-to-earth, vernacular origins. For example, the orchestral introduction to the second *Kyrie* is annotated 'Une jeune pucelle'—a young flea!

It's not very obvious how to square this with the purport of the words – 'Lord have mercy' – but we try to acknowledge both the seriousness of what we are saying and the celebratory nature of what we are singing – the occasion it was meant for, in other words – and to characterise the similar musical material differently according to which part of the Mass it is setting. The groundwork had been laid for this annual peculiarity by the time Charpentier wrote the Messe: many of his compatriots wrote keyboard transcriptions of these noëls. Such works by Raison and Daquin, for example, are still played by organists today, and, in my experience at least, seem to be well received on Christmas Eve—at least in modern-day Leeds!

The association between the Comédie-Française and the French church is not unique to Charpentier, or to the Midnight Mass. For example, some of the

organ voluntaries of Lefébure-Wély, dating from 150 years later, rounded off church services in a way that almost bordered on slapstick. Yet other French musical-liturgical expectations were in some ways very strict, and still are: the tradition of organists improvising highly prescribed and complex fugues, is still *de rigueur* in some French churches.

Charpentier felt somewhat overshadowed at times, but in a reflective sort of way: he once said, ‘I was a musician, regarded as good among the good, and as ignorant among the ignorant. And since those who scorned me numbered more than those who praised me, my music brought me little honour but was a great burden.’ Nevertheless, he had some success and, by the standards of the time, a good measure of stability and recognition.

Like a lot of Baroque music, there is much adaptability here. Charpentier scored the work for strings and two *flûtes* (which probably means recorders, in modern parlance). Having played the chamber organ part myself in a period-instrument performance with something close to this scoring, I think that the orchestral accompaniment translates very well to a modern organ, particularly in the hands of someone as talented, experienced and sensitively alert as Alan Horsey, who I’m delighted is joining us for tonight’s concert.

Charpentier’s setting has another oddity, at least to typical modern British ears: the omission of the final part of the Mass, the *Dona nobis pacem*—the plea for peace. Many performances these days include it anyway: this is perfectly natural and practical within the flexible structure of the music. But it’s not in Charpentier’s original, and we’ve decided to go with this omission this evening: in some ways, finishing with a single, simple ‘miserere nobis’ ('have mercy on us') brings us back full circle to the Kyrie. The words of the Mass don’t constitute a self-contained narrative anyway, but we will not leave you on a pleading note: the concert will finish with a more upbeat message!

Gardner: Cantata for Christmas

We are of course privileged, as performing musicians, to be able to be so actively and deeply involved with giving through art. That privilege is sometimes heightened by serendipity, and tonight, for me as a newcomer in particular, I feel particularly unworthy to be standing on the podium in regard to the next piece. The very fine English composer John Gardner was a good friend of this choir, and wrote the group a piece (the *Waltzsongs*) through his friendship with its much-respected and long-serving former conductor, the late Philip Honnor. Gardner is today best known for his Christmas

music—particularly his jaunty, beautifully crafted asymmetrical setting of *Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day*. He was equally successful with large-scale works. For example, his *First Symphony* was conducted by Barbirolli at the Cheltenham Festival, and he had an opera performed at Sadler's Wells. His *Cantata for Christmas* is *prima facie* a setting of seven independent Christmas texts. The unifying themes become apparent only gradually: the tunes we know as *How Brightly Shines the Morning Star* and *Unto Us is Born a Son* are the clear subjects of the first and fifth movements, but throughout the work they can be heard in many more or less subtle guises. I love the vitality and variety of Gardner's writing here, its colour, and particularly the way in which he recaptures the joyous folk origins from which so many of our familiar carols spring. The seven pieces are very diverse in music and words—and languages, too: English, Latin, French and German!

Vaughan Williams: Fantasia on Christmas Carols

Indeed, folk origins are never far away this evening: our final composer, Vaughan Williams, maintained a strong interest in English folk music in particular. This was to some extent in the spirit of the age: people could sense the old, slow and predictable order under existential threat from war and from relentless modernisation. It is sobering to realise, for all the horrors and problems of that time, that those threats are less fundamental than the ones facing humanity today. No doubt some rose-tinted nostalgia was at work, but there was much unstoppable change: in particular, the 'village' way of life, and the distinctiveness of the local, seemed to be disappearing fast.

So Vaughan Williams was not alone: many other composers collected or set traditional tunes, and the movement to preserve a (possibly) dying art found its way into the education system, particularly via Arthur Somervell—another gifted and insufficiently-known British composer: his *Shropshire Lad* cycle is particularly good. Where Vaughan Williams stands out is perhaps in the range of genres into which he wove this precious resource. Yes, there are direct settings – *Linden Lea* is a perennial favourite of soloists and choirs alike – but he also adapted some folk melodies for church use: many now-classic hymns are his harmonisations and regularisations of secular tunes. And there are instrumental settings, too; for example, the *Six Studies in English Folksong* for clarinet and piano. Here, as with many other composers who were sensitive to their musical roots, it's not always clear where lies the boundary between original composition and folk/arrangement.

So it is perhaps appropriate that Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* is dedicated to his era's most famous collector of folksong, Cecil Sharp. This piece is both skilful and chock full of good tunes: it is a carol medley, but quite a seamless one. Tonight I'm very grateful to Simon Pratt for taking on the baritone solo part, which is a central feature of the work.

Like Charpentier, Vaughan Williams had both self-doubt and confidence. Breaking the mould of family tradition (high-profile lawyers) wasn't easy, and his early teachers weren't encouraging. Later on, he described his own technique as 'amateurish', but also believed strongly that he was right to swim against the tide of British culture by valuing home-grown heritage. He spent much of his childhood and later life around leafy Leith Hill in Surrey, with its steep escarpments and woods of box, and ancient villages with names like Abinger Hammer and Friday Street, hidden among beech woods. Knowing these places, it is all too easy to see how Vaughan Williams' feelings for vanishing heritage were nourished.

Not only is this my first concert conducting the Huddersfield Singers, it is also my first 'proper' concert as a conductor *per se*, after many years of répétiteuring and directing smaller-scale choral events, mainly from the keyboard. However blessed one is – and I have been – life is uncertain. Christmas, and music, are anchors for so many people. Christmas is a time for reflection, for warmth and for celebration too; and also for looking ahead: I do indeed join the choir as they round off the concert by wishing you all a very 'happy New Year, both now and evermore, Amen.'

—Daniel Gordon

Acknowledgements

The Huddersfield Singers extend their thanks to the volunteers who have helped in the production of this concert by providing refreshments in the interval, selling tickets and programmes at the door, and being of general assistance behind the scenes. Their contribution has been invaluable.

Dedication

The Huddersfield Singers express their collective gratitude to long-term supporter **Gordon Sykes** as he retires as an active member of the choir. Gordon initially served as a President of distinction in the 1990s and subsequently became a loyal member of the group in his retirement years, singing with the choir for over a decade. In particular, he has been a generous ongoing patron for more than two decades. In recognition of his support over the years, the choir dedicates tonight's concert to him.

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