

Edinburgh Singers Belgium Tour, 6-8 April

Programme Notes & Translations

David Peebles (d. 1579): Si Quis Diligit Me

The motet quotes Christ in St John's Gospel concerning a follower's love in observing a master's command and the rewarding love between God and his disciples. It is sung with a refined, paced, cool severity. King James V approved, "being a musitian ... did lyke it verry weill". Peebles was at the time a canon at St Andrews Cathedral. The Reformation started shortly afterwards and he adopted the new faith with ease, marrying and composing psalms for the revised forms of worship.

If a man love me, he will keep my words

and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him,

and make our abode with him.

Alleluia.

John Stainer (1840 - 1901): God So Loved The World

This ninth movement from The Crucifixion of 1887 quotes from St John's Gospel (3:16-17) of self-giving or sacrificial love in the death of Jesus. The oratorio is entitled 'A Meditation on the Sacred Passion' and could be described as a Victorian variant on Bach's Passions. It takes the audience through the narrative and spiritual reflections that relate to Christ's final week with arias, choruses and congregational singing.

Stainer was a musical prodigy, performing Bach fugues at the age of seven. He had a distinguished academic career culminating with the Chair of Music at Oxford University. He held organist appointments at St Paul's Cathedral, London and elsewhere. Remembered mainly for this Crucifixion, some twenty anthems and a few hymn tunes and arias persist but are rarely performed.

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809 - 1847): Psalm 100 (Jauchzet dem Herrn)

This 'Old Hundredth' was composed with protestant vigour by Mendelssohn in 1844 (and published eight years after his death) as a commission of many psalms towards Berlin Cathedral's new liturgy, a project driven by the Prussian king of the time.

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands!

Serve the Lord with gladness, come before his presence with singing.

Know ye that the Lord is God, it is He that has made us and not we ourselves; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture.

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise, be thankful unto Him and bless His name.

For the Lord, He is good, and His love is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations.

Sir William Walton (1902 - 1983): Set Me As A Seal Upon Thine Heart

Walton obliged his patroness, Lady Alice Wimbourne, with a momentary diversion to compose this piece. It was for the marriage in 1938 of Lady Alice's son. The words are from the Old Testament's 'Song of Solomon', famed for its theme of love, often erotically decorated. But neither this text nor the music are sentimental or facile; they are intensely bitter-sweet with challenging harmonies that point to the transcendental, enduring love of marriage.

Gustav Holst (1874 - 1934): I Love My Love

It is a Mr Gardiner, Classics dominie at Edinburgh Academy at the close of the 19th century, that we thank for this simple and appealing folk song. It is one of the 1400 texts and melodies that he curated from his visits around workhouses, hayfields and so on in the south of England. Holst (like Ralph Vaughan Williams) shared Gardiner's absorption in the rich variety of traditional songs secreted in England's countryside; we sing Holst's setting of this song.

It is a tense tale of inconsolable love: a girl is confined in custody, considered mad, but still pines for her absent amour; ultimately the two are rewarded by marriage.

Traditional, arr. Hyo-Won Woo: Mo-Li-Hua (Jasmine Flower)

This 18th century folk song is widely known and loved across China. It is used on many occasions – as an interim national anthem, finding itself in Turandot, the opening and closing of the Olympic Games and serving to rally at political protests. The Edinburgh Singers were asked to sing it at last month's Chinese 'New Year of the Pig' celebration concert in the Usher Hall.

What a beautiful jasmine flower,

Sweet-smelling, beautiful, stems full of buds,

Fragrant and white, everyone praises.

Let me pluck you down,

Give to someone else,

Jasmine flower, Oh jasmine flower.

Bob Chilcott (b. 1955): The Singing Heart

Chilcott is a major presence, even as The Observer records 'a hero', in the British choral scene. He was one of the well-known King's Singers until 1997 when he became a full-time composer.

The glorious, expansive work that we sing this evening is amongst his earliest. The words claim his conviction that choral music is a common language that reaches beyond boundaries to unite our globe's great civilisations.

Francisco Guerrero (1529 - 1599): Surge, Propera Amica Mea

At just 17 years of age, Guerrero was appointed Maestro de Capilla at Jaén Cathedral, Spain. The text of this work comes from the 'Song of Solomon', one of the earliest sources of romantic verse. It captures an optimistic lover calling his partner to escape from the misery of winter and revel with him in the delights of spring.

Guerrero has brought the words of this extended motet into his own time with the second sopranos repeating throughout a cantus firma chant 'Veni sponsa Christi'- 'Come, bride of Christ'.

Arise, my love, my dove, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.

The flowers appear on the earth; the time of pruning has come, and the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land.

The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance.

Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

Andrew Wise (b. 1957): Kyrie from The Bavo Mass

This English composer's musical formation started at Cambridge and The Royal Academy of Music. From there his career has taken him to opera houses and conservatoires across Europe as conductor, tutor and performer. Our Musical Director met him last year, working together on Tosca at Nederlandse Reisopera, with Alistair as assistant conductor and Andrew as chorus master. This encounter introduced The Bavo Mass to tonight's programme.

We shall be singing from this mass in the space for which it was written - St Bavo's Cathedral in Ghent - on our Belgian tour in April. Bavo is patron saint of the city. He was a nobleman who was converted to Christianity in the 7th century. Filled with remorse when he met afresh a man he had previously sold into slavery, he disposed of all his wealth and lived as a recluse in the grounds of the abbey he founded in Ghent.

Ēriks Ešenvalds (b. 1977): Salutation

The composer has chosen verse from the 2000 plus poems authored by the great Bengali mystic poet and 1913 Nobel Prize Winner, Rabindranath Tagore. The writer pleads that his mindfulness will widen to grasp all his experiences and harmoniously distil them to a pure silence ready to be laid at the presence of God. His thoughts relate to repetitive purposes in nature.

Ešenvalds is of our day, one of the most sought after for new choral work. He teaches at the Latvian Academy of Music, is widely recorded and is greatly admired for his distinctive styles which reflect Baltic purity and minimalism.

Roxanna Panufnik (b. 1968): Love Endureth

Roxanna Panufnik, daughter of the distinguished Polish composer Sir Andrzej Panufnik, studied at the Royal Academy of Music. She writes full-time across the spectrum - opera, ballet, music theatre, chamber and film music. Her works include the powerful Westminster Mass. In tonight's setting of Psalm 136, first performed in 2012, we sing to the permanence and loyalty of love. The composer promotes a Biblical tradition in music and chooses to include Sephardic chant and Hebrew responses.

Ki L'olam chasdo; For forever His mercy

Jake Runestad (b. 1986): Let My Love Be Heard

Runestad's works are amongst the most frequently performed in the US and he's even been called an American 'choral rockstar', by broadcaster American Public Media.

This piece gained popularity on social media, when a California State University choir heard that one of its students was amongst the 130 killed in the 2015 Paris bombing. In a couple of hours they recorded this work for all across the campus and the country to hear and grieve. "It is one of the most beautiful interpretations of my music I have ever heard", recalls the composer.

The words are by Alfred Noyes (1880 – 1958), British poet and playwright.

Sir James MacMillan (b. 1977): The Gallant Weaver

This wistful, heart-felt composition is the product of two towering Ayrshire talents – poet Robert Burns (1759 – 1796) and composer James MacMillan.

The River Cart runs rolling (rowin) through Paisley. Its banks hosted weavers well known for their radical views. No bourgeois father wanted his daughter to marry into that community! In this song his daughter tells of her enduring passion for a Gallant (flirtatious) Weaver. She says she would have lost interest (tine) in any of her past suitors had she married one of them. Her father wants to put an end to this liaison. He has found a landowning groom offering security and respectable politics and now has signed a dowry contract (tocherband). We are left wondering if the planned marriage happened...