



directed by Alistair Digges

St Mary's Cathedral, Palmerston Place

25th September 2021

<i>Charles V. Stanford</i>	Beati quorum via The Blue Bird (soloist: Kirsty McRobbie)
<i>Anton Bruckner</i>	Os iusti meditabitur sapientiam
<i>Felix Mendelssohn</i>	Beati mortui
<i>Giuseppe Verdi</i>	Laudi alla Vergine Maria
<i>Felix Mendelssohn</i>	Mitten wir im Leben sind
<i>Josef G. Rheinberger</i>	Mass in E flat
<i>Ēriks Ešenvalds</i>	The Heavens' Flock
<i>Robert L. Pearsall</i>	Lay a Garland

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Programme Notes

Beati quorum via - Sir Charles V. Stanford (1852 - 1924)

With Purcell's death in 1696 English music withered for two centuries pending its restoration by a group of composers – Stanford was one of them. His symphonies and concertos largely forgotten, it is his church music that is remembered. This contemplative work, based on Psalm 119, was composed in 1905.

The Blue Bird - Sir Charles V. Stanford (1852 - 1924)

Of Irish origin, Stanford became professor of music at Cambridge and a founder of the Royal College of Music. His non-church creations were soon forgotten after his death. An exception is this stunning miniature where he fuses the words of Mary Coleridge's verse with his composition to paint a gloriously stunning study of a bluebird – complete serenity.

Os justi meditabitur sapientiam - Anton Bruckner (1824 - 1896)

Psalm 36, asserting one's security in following God's laws, was set to Bruckner's music in 1879. Throughout his life, religion and its sacraments were for Bruckner profound religious experiences. He was cathedral organist and tutor in Linz but was so absorbed by his studies that he did not compose until in his 40s. Then he settled in Vienna to write (and continually revise) his symphonies. He died a bachelor despite a lifetime of making marriage proposals, right up to his death - but all were declined.

Beati mortui - Felix Mendelssohn (1809 - 1847)

Created for four-part male chorus, this motet takes its words from the New Testament's Revelation. The text describes an assuring outcome in mankind's afterlife. Mendelssohn was commissioned to write it by the Rector of Leipzig University in 1837, for the commemoration service of a medical professor. Twelve men from Bach's St Thomas' church choir sang its first performance.

Laudi alla Vergine Maria - Giuseppe Verdi (1813 - 1901)

In his final years, while creating his *Otello*, Verdi returned to his role as a church musician and in 1898 created choral music for this prayer, lifted from Dante's *Divina Commedia*. At its première the audience clamoured for a repeat.

Although the work looks back to the Renaissance's thin texture and clear cadences, Verdi's biographer credits the creation with the subtlest of harmonic and rhythmic inflexions – unashamedly modern in character.

Mitten wir im Leben sind - Felix Mendelssohn (1809 - 1847)

Martin Luther wrote this text, one of his many hymns, when he was 41. He had been excommunicated from the Catholic Church and was actively preaching that faith alone justified mankind to God. His source was an antiphon from the 11th century; the present-day Lutheran church still sings this work.

Mendelssohn creates a setting for two choirs to perform with austerity and raw emotion. He described his work to his sister with these words: "It growls angrily, or whistles dark blue".

Mass in E flat (Cantus Missae) - Josef G. Rheinberger (1839 - 1901)

In our principal work tonight we meet with musical precocity. At only seven years old, with a small pedal board specially made for him, the young Rheinberger was organist at the parish church of Vaduz, Liechtenstein. A year later he composed a three part mass for his church choir. He left Vaduz at 12, studied music at the Munich Conservatoire and at 28 years of age was appointed its professor of organ and music theory.

Rheinberger led so many musical groups around Munich that in 1877 Prince Ludwig appointed him Royal Court conductor. Overall, he produced a large canon of over 200 works, including organ sonatas, motets, masses, motets and symphonies.

The most widely appreciated of his twelve masses is the one we perform tonight. It is a setting for two choirs singing to each other, and at times together. Remarkably, Rheinberger took only five consecutive days in 1878 to produce this work. On the day



following its completion, Rheinberger dedicated this mass to the newly elected Pope Leo XII who showed his appreciation by awarding Rheinberger a Gregorian Medal. Years later, the German music historian Otto Ursprung praised this mass as the "most beautiful, pure vocal music of the 19th century".

Rheinberger remained with the Conservatoire for the 40 years until his death. Interred in Munich, his remains were destroyed by Allied war time bombings. He was transferred back to Liechtenstein in 1950, home again and in place to be revered by his countrymen.

The Heavens' Flock - Ēriks Ešenvalds (1977 -)

We are pleased to return once more to the music of this celebrated contemporary Latvian composer, whose music is so popular with choirs and audiences worldwide. The words form a celestial meditation by Paulaan Peterson, Oregon's poet laureate, in which the stars are described as "The Heavens' flock".

Lay a Garland - Robert Pearsall (1795 - 1856)

Pearsall was an English lawyer who lived most of his life in Germany, where he was able to develop as a mainly self-taught composer. For this exquisite, masterly composition, he has gone back 230 years to a play, *The Maid's Tragedy*, by Beaumont and Fletcher to source the work's theme. To her close friends the heroine declares her unfaltering love for her fiancé, but he has been commanded to marry his king's mistress.

Relax into the three minutes of this romantic motet.