**Extended printable version of the notes and biographies for GCCD 4086**

English choral music lay under the shadow of Mendelssohn’s *Elijah* for the second half of the nineteenth century. With Handel’s *Messiah* it provided a ready model for the many oratorios and cantatas written in response to the Victorian appetites for new music at the many choral festivals which were such a dominant feature of British musical life before the advent of recordings and radio. It was also a world in which the growing stylistic imperative of Wagner became more insistent and resulted in strongly divided critical views amongst those who strongly resented his influence. While acknowledging his Mendelssohnian heritage,Elgar drew on the strengths of both traditions to produce a new vigorous choral style which while strongly dramatic also signalled of a new creativity among English composers. In *The Dream of Gerontius*, in 1900, Elgar certainly celebrated his discovery of Wagner’s Parsifal, albeit transmuted into something brilliant and personal. Those composers who came later could not help but be influenced by Elgar's individual voice, but surprisingly few took Elgar’s approach as their starting point.

Our programme includes one young composer, Havergal Brian, who was writing in the thick of these artistic pressures, inspired by what he had heard at the North Staffordshire Festivals. Three other composers (Bridge, Howells and Dyson), whose works appeared after the First World War, reflected varied facets of a changed world, with a vibrant new generation of music.

While many who became well-known composers in the UK in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came from well-off families, and were able to launch their careers in relative comfort, all in this programme came from poor backgrounds and had to make their own way and live by their music: they were all-self-made men.

***With Proud Thanksgiving*:** **Sir Edward** **Elgar** was born in 1857, the son of a Worcester music and piano dealer. While he lacked formal academic training he enjoyed a wide-ranging practical apprenticeship in music, working for the family business and also playing as a jobbing violinist and organist. It also allowed him access to music books and scores from his father’s shop. He felt keenly the social slights accorded a musician in Victorian Society, even more a Catholic one. As a violin teacher, music unlocked many doors for him, and his friendship through music with wealthy Worcestershire music lovers gave him an entrée into the genteel society of his time, which culminated in his marriage to Caroline Alice Roberts, a woman almost nine years his senior, in 1889. Elgar only gradually became established as a composer. A succession of increasingly elaborate cantatas in the 1890s gave him an ever-growing provincial reputation, and it also gave him a fluency which would allow him to meet deadlines later. Thus *King Olaf* in 1896 and *Caractacus* in 1898 led on to *The Dream of Gerontius* in 1900. In fact the real breakthrough came with the *Enigma Variations* in 1899, which put him on the orchestral

map almost overnight. His popular success was firmly cemented with the first two *Pomp and Circumstance marches*, first heard in Liverpool in October 1901. When Elgar wrote the three parts of *The Spirit of England*, setting words by Laurence Binyon, during the First World War, he was producing one of the most widely played British memorial works of the war. During February and March 1920, prompted by his publisher Novello, he abridged the first part, ***For the Fallen as With Proud Thanksgiving*** with military band accompaniment, intending it to be performed at the unveiling of the Cenotaph on 11 November 1920. However, it was not used and Elgar orchestrated it during April 1921 for a first performance on 7 May at the Royal Albert Hall. It reappeared as the closing music for *A Pageant of Empire* in 1924 and was then forgotten until heard again when revived by Robert Tucker’s Broadheath Singers at Eton in 1988.

***A Prayer*: Frank Bridge** came from a musical family, the tenth of twelve children. Bridge’s father was a violin teacher and music hall conductor in Brighton, and Frank was involved in practical music-making from an early age, playing in his father's orchestras and even conducting. Although he went to the Royal College of Music to study violin and piano, after three years he became yet another composition pupil of Sir Charles Villiers Stanford. Bridge's route into the profession was as an active performer, both on the viola and as conductor, avail-able whenever a deputy was needed, a reputation he never entirely outgrew during forty years as a professional musician.

Later, Bridge was the composition teacher of the teenage Benjamin Britten, but he also left us a large catalogue of works which show radical stylistic developments in the 1920s. Popular orchestral scores, such as *The Sea* failed to prepare public and critics for his rapprochement with the European avant-garde in the 1920s, and his reputation suffered. Almost forgotten as a composer for thirty years after his death, it was Benjamin Britten’s revival of the late orchestra; tone-poem *Enter Spring*, in 1966, and the activities of the Frank Bridge Trust (now Bequest) in promoting his music, that led to the high reputation he enjoys today.

Bridge was profoundly depressed by the First World War. The personal blow for him came with the sinking of the liner 'The Lusitania' in June 1915. Immediately he composed his *Lament for string orchestra in memory of 'Catherine, aged 9'* who, with her family, was lost in the disaster. Increasingly the war appeared like a thread through his music and in 1916 he made this setting of Thomas a Kempis’s meditation on inner peace as a commentary on the war. However, the words might well have appeared frankly pacifist during the conflict, and although the vocal score is dated March 1916, Bridge did not orchestrate it until October 1918. Published and performed almost immediately in 1919, it became a work of consolation, its intense hymn-like sentiments seeming a memorial for those lost in the War. Thomas a Kempis’s seven short verses are set with brief orchestral links between, as the emotional intensity builds, the fifth being prefaced by a reprise of the opening words. In this work Bridge, not an habitual choral composer, seems to be take his cue from his colleague Gustav Holst, with the long-running passages of flowing parallel triads (first heard on flutes at the end of the orchestral prelude).

After the hushed peace of the first verse the affirmative fast music of the second and third verses provide a first climactic point which runs on into a reprise of the opening words. But it is in the fourth verse, where at the words 'love to be despised and not to be known in this world', Bridge achieves his moment of transcendental vision, where on a cymbal clash the music tries to tear itself from the tonality suggested by the note G playing in the base. The vision fades and we are back with the second reprise of the opening words, the chorus fervently but softly asking 'that my heart may be at peace'. Now divided into two choirs — in eight parts — the chorus maintain the note of quiet prayer and supplication to the radiant closing bars. The music ends on the single word 'Rest', and a vision of eternity, emotive music indeed in 1919.

***Sine Nomine*** (for soprano, tenor, chorus and orchestra) **Herbert Howells** was born in Lydney, Gloucestershire and became articled to Sir William Brewer, organist of Gloucester Cathedral when young. In 1912 he went to the Royal College of Music to study with Stanford and in 1914 produced a large-scale piano concerto, his first, which was given a noted performance just before the outbreak of War. He was not able to enlist owing to poor health, and was so bad he was not expected to survive. But when still young he won a Carnegie prize for his *Piano Quartet* and in the 1920s he produced a string of orchestral works in a distinctive personal idiom including the *Pastoral Rhapsody* of 1923 and *Paradise Rondel* of 1925 both, like *Sine Nomine*, visions of ecstatic nature mysticism.

Howells’ life was changed by the death of his son, Michael, in 1935, and this seems to have affected most of the music that followed, and was eventually celebrated by his personal requiem *Hymnus Paradisi* completed before the Second World War but not performed until 1950 when it was recognised as a masterpiece. After Michael’s death Howells's varied early catalogue of music became forgotten and was not promoted by its composer, and he was only known as a composer of church and organ music, and for a few well-known songs. Only since his death has his large and varied catalogue of music been explored again, and his larger stature recognised.

In the polyphonic period composers of masses named their music after the idea they took as the cantus firmus, so ‘sine nomine’ (literally `without name') denoted a mass based upon an original melody rather than a borrowed theme. Herbert Howells called his *Mass in the Dorian Mode*, one of his earliest works, the *Missa Sine Nomine*. Ten years later he used the concept again, when in 1922 he produced *Sine Nomine*, subtitling it ‘A Phantasy’ and giving it the opus number 37. This was written for the 1922 Three Choirs Festival held at Gloucester, and at which many new works of the day were heard. This work is notable for the instrumental use of voices and for two vocalising soloists, the chorus only coming in at the end, when it is in eight parts and very softly sung indeed. The pianissimo voices weave together with the orchestra, and are finally crowned by the two soloists. Howells instructs that at first the upper voices just hum while the basses sing to the vowel sound in `dove'. Here we have overtones of Holst in *Neptune*, Ravel in *Daphnis and Chloe* and Debussy in the *Nocturnes*. Howells use of solo voices is very much of his time, and while in 1922 he is unlikely yet to have heard Nielsen’s *Third Symphony*,

the Vaughan Williams of the *Pastoral Symphony* which had appeared the previous year had doubtless inspired the young composer. For a short time this technique was all the rage, and other vocalising works of the time include Bliss’s *Rhapsody* and early *Piano Concerto*, Bax's *Walsingham* and Vaughan Williams’ *Flos Campi.*

After the first performance, which Howells conducted, on 5 September 1922, it was not heard again until revived in Paul Spicer’s performing edition (recorded here) at the 1992 Three Choirs at Gloucester. Hearing Howells’ music in the cathedral acoustic made one realise how in 1922 it must have sounded modern and exciting, and it has to be said that even now Howells’ palette is remarkably striking.

***The Blacksmiths:*** **Sir George Dyson** is a remarkable example of a self-made man, who, born in industrial Halifax became the voice of public-school music and Director of the Royal College of Music. Like Walton, Dyson’s escape from the industrial north was through music. He first enjoyed local celebrity as organist at the local Baptist church, and he was an FRCO at the age of 16. He won an open scholarship to the Royal College of Music in 1900 where he studied with Stanford, then in his prime as a composition teacher. Winning the Mendelssohn Scholarship in 1904 - intended to help new graduates to travel - on Stanford’s advice he went to Italy, and later in Vienna and Berlin he became acquainted with the leading musicians of the day. One of these was the conductor Arthur Nikisch, who presented Dyson’s early tone-poem *Siena*, which after three performances was withdrawn by its composer and is now lost. But Dyson's early *Evening Service in D* pointed the way ahead, and is still one of his best-known works.

On returning to England he needed a job, and thanks to Sir Hubert Parry, Director of the RCM, he became Director of Music at the Royal Naval College at Osborne. Contacts were everything in the enclosed world of Edwardian music! From there Dyson went to Marlborough College and on the outbreak of war enlisted, becoming celebrated as brigade grenadier officer of the 99th infantry brigade for a training pamphlet on grenade warfare. In a letter dated 5 December 1915, Dyson vividly described the life he was living in the trenches: ‘*We are continually under shellfire... [and the enemy] has unfortunately caught a squad of men in the open outside with appalling results. Our own guns are blazing away like mad, so that you can't hear yourself think.... The trenches are simply vile in this weather. Between knee deep and thigh deep in mud, in addition to the havoc wrought by the Bosch*...’. All too soon he was shell-shocked and invalided back to England. In the 1920s Dyson lectured on new music (though he was never a champion of the avant garde). At first teaching at the RCM, he soon became Director of Music at Wellington College and in 1924 he moved to Winchester, where he developed his mature career as a composer. He is best known for a string of tuneful works for chorus and orchestra, starting in 1928 with *In Honour of the City*. The later extended setting of *The Canterbury Pilgrims*, evocative and colourful Chaucerian portraits, is probably his best-known work, and in its day was widely sung. In the 1930s followed a succession of choral works: *St Paul's Voyage to Melita* given at the Hereford Three Choirs in 1933 and *The Blacksmiths* for the Leeds Festival in 1934, and *Nebuchadnezzar* at Worcester in 1935. There was also various orchestral music, including a *Symphony* and *Violin Concerto*. Dyson's personal voice was undimmed. and though now sounding more out of fashion, after the war came *Sweet Thames Runs Softly* and *Agincourt*. Dyson also wrote over 50 short choral settings, many of which he gathered in collections such as *Four Songs for Sailors* in 1948.

*The Blacksmiths* is inscribed ‘to the memory of J.W.D.’ — in fact the composer’s father, John Dyson, who was himself a blacksmith. With this in mind, we might rather assume the piece had its origins in the composer’s childhood in industrial Halifax, but the German title of the piece as printed on the vocal score is *Die Waffenschmiede*. This translates as `war smiths' — in fact gunsmiths. It was cannons they were casting, and this throws a different light on the music, particularly when we remember it is a piece written by someone shell-shocked in France in 1916. Like the Elgar, Bridge and Howells this too was a work over which the shadow of the Western Front had fallen all too evidently. Dyson subtitled the music ‘a fantasy for Chorus, Pianoforte and Orchestra, from a Middle-English poem of the XIV Century, freely adapted’. He notes that ‘*the choral interpretation of the poem is intended to be ‘realistic’, in the sense that the vocal tone-colours should always reflect the strong alliterations and assonances of the words’*. *The Blacksmiths* was written for the 1934 Leeds Festival, and has been known in a version for two pianos and choir, the full orchestral version unheard since the 1930s. Dyson writes an extended part for obbligato piano, here played by the RLPO’s pianist Pauline Alston.

***Psalm 23:* Havergal Brian** was born in the Staffordshire village of Dresden, now a suburb of Stoke-on-Trent. Both his parents worked in the potteries in Longton and he left school at the age of 12. He became a choir boy and the deputy organist in the local church and at the age of 15 obtained a part-time post as organist. Brian became apprenticed as a joiner, but was eventually sacked when he was found using planed boards on which to write music and was also absent playing the organ. His inspiration was fired anew by hearing a rehearsal of Elgar’s *King Olaf* at the North Staffordshire Triennial Festival in 1896. Brian’s early life continued with a succession of clerical jobs working for timber firms and pursuing music in his spare time. On 13 March 1903 Elgar’s *The Dream of Gerontius* was given by Stoke-on-Trent forces in the Victoria Hall, Hanley, and Brian was fully involved with that performance, possibly the most perfect yet given of Elgar’s masterpiece. It seems probable that it was after that performance that he started to write the Psalm recorded here.

Havergal Brian’s large scale setting of *Psalm 23* - in Miles Coverdale’s 1535 translation (as in the Book of Common Prayer) was probably originally written in 1904. Brian told me that the piece had been written in 1901, but he was curiously hazy about it and it seems likely that he merely quoted the then accepted date. It seems probable it was a few years later, and is still the earliest piece on this programme. Brian, in his late-twenties, was still living in the Potteries, and regularly exposed to the great choirs of the time. He made this a big and varied piece and one can imagine his hopes for the music —'that'll show ‘em!’ This is the work that Brian showed to Elgar around 1905 and later reported: ‘A*fter perusing the pages, he jumped up and excitedly praised it. Said I was a modernist, a singer and original*.’ However, nothing came of it and Brian never heard his music. He was also curiously matter of fact about the way he said that the original orchestral full score was lost at Lewes in 1920, but the vocal score eventually turned up and the composer re-orchestrated it in 1945.

Does this orchestration represent Brian in 1904 or forty years later? Malcolm MacDonald has reminded us what Brian told Reginald Nettel in December 1944: that his publisher, Cranz, had returned his unpublished works including the vocal score of the *Psalm 23* which Brian then found ‘a little master-piece’ and in February 1945 he remarked that he was re-scoring it for its ‘original orchestra’. Now, having sat through a recording session, score in hand, one is inclined to say that Brian achieved a sound and a technique that seems to be securely of its ostensible time, though clearly one informed by forty years of composition. It is also interesting to hear Brian’s treatment of the chorus, and in particular the many soft passages where he clearly had in mind the massed choirs of the great choral festivals. Yet even in the opening bars, the solemn marching music, the scale, and the sudden juxtaposition of opposing moods were all redolent of the mature Brian. Here was surely a composer who had found his voice in the early 1900s, as he must have realised anew, when he revisited the vocal score again in 1944.

Brian's treatment is to break the text down into strongly characterised sections, where one or two lines are built up into vividly contrasted mini-movements with much repetition of the words. The solo when it comes is brief though itself with a contrasted section. In leading towards the end with a fugato for his setting of ‘for thy loving kindness’, in 1904 Brian presumably felt that to be a serious choral composer a new work needed academic respectability. The first performance came after Brian had died, and was given by the Brighton Festival Chorus at All Saints, Hove in 1973. Later, the RLPO were the orchestra when it was sung at the 1992 Three Choirs.

***Jehova, Quam Multi Sunt Hostes Mei*** (orchestrated by Sir Edward Elgar): **Henry Purcell** made this setting of the Latin version of Psalm 3 for domestic use in 1678 when he was 19. At this time he was deeply involved with the music at Westminster Abbey, and soon after writing this piece he succeeded John Blow as organist there, remaining for the rest of his life. While Purcell may well have intended this music to be sung one to a part, Elgar views it as a sonorous and massive outpouring, his orchestration emphasising its stately qualities. In the 1920s Elgar made various orchestral transcriptions ranging from Bach to Chopin, all of them saying more about Elgar than of their original composers. Elgar began this orchestration of the accompaniment of Purcell’s verse motet (*Jehova, how many are they that vex me*) in January 1929 and completed it on 26 June. The first performance was at Worcester Cathedral during that year’s Three Choirs Festival, on 10 September. It was long forgotten and later reappeared at Westminster Cathedral in 1995 when it was heard on BBC Television, in Donald Hunt’s performing edition, which is again used in this recording.

**KEVIN MATTHEWS** After teaching for five years Kevin entered the Royal Northern College of Music in 1994 to study with Anthony Roden. Whilst there he took leading roles in RNCM opera productions and won the Alexander Young Prize for singing and the Ricordi Opera Prize. He worked with Glyndebourne Festival Opera for three consecutive seasons and tours and in Raymond Gubbay’s productions at the Royal Albert Hall and with Garsington Opera. Recent engagements include *Oedipus Rex* (Stravinsky) with Opera North and the role of Gorlaeus in *De Materie* for the RNCM’s Andriessen Festival in 2002.

**ELIZABETH DONOVAN** was still a student in 1991 at the Royal Northern College of Music, studying voice with Caroline Crawshaw. After earlier appearances with the Welsh National Youth Opera in 1999 she returned to play the Grand Priestess in *Hippolyte et Aricie* by Rameau, repeating the role for the Yorke Trust Opera. Successful in many Welsh vocal competitions, including the Blue Ribband under 28 Prize at the Lampeter Eisteddfod, she is the youngest winner of the W.Towyn Roberts Scholarship at the Royal National Eisteddfod. Other successes include the Miriam Licette Scholarship and prestigious RNCM Frederic Cox Award for singing, and 2002 winner of the Welsh Singers’ Prize making her the Welsh representative in the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World in June 2003. Elizabeth appears regularly on the concert platform in repertoire as varied as Bach, Dvorak and Respighi.

**William Prideaux** read music at Liverpool University, obtaining first class honours for his work on orchestration and Baroque editing. He then studied voice with Mark Wildman as a postgraduate at the Royal Academy of Music, partly funded by Lawrence Atwell’s Charity.

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**Douglas Bostock (b.1955)** is Permanent Guest Conductor of the Munich Symphony Orchestra and Principal Guest Conductor of the Chamber Philharmonic of Bohemia. From 1991-8 he was Music Director of the Carlsbad Symphony Orchestra in the Czech Republic. A former pupil of Sir Adrian Boult , Maestro Bostock is one of the outstanding British conductors of his generation. After close collaboration with the Southwest German Philharmonic he embarked on an international conducting career which takes him to guest engagements with leading orchestras in Europe, America and Asia. Numerous CD recordings of a wide and varied range of music, radio and television productions, and frequent appearances at international music festivals document his versatile musical personality. Douglas Bostock's repertoire covers a broad spectrum of genres and styles. ***ClassiCo***

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