

Nantwich Choral Society



ROSSINI LA PETITE MESSE SOLENNELLE

Saturday 25th June 1988



The Parish Church of St. Mary, Nantwich
at 7.30 p.m.

SPONSORED BY NMW COMPUTERS

NANTWICH CHORAL SOCIETY

Catrin Ley, soprano
Marjorie Seddon, contralto
James Watson, tenor
Benjamin Odom, bass

Joy Roberts, pianoforte
Richard Watson, harmonium

conducted by
Stephen Buckman

(Harmonium kindly loaned by James Watson)

PETITE MESSE SOLENNELLE

G. Rossini

Kyrie eleison (soloists and chorus)
Gloria in excelsis Deo (soloists and chorus)
Gratias agimus tibi (contralto, tenor and bass)
Domine Deus (tenor)
Qui tollis peccata mundi (soprano and contralto)
Quoniam tu solus sanctus (bass)
Cum Sancto Spiritu (soloists and chorus)

INTERVAL

Refreshments provided by: The 38th. South West Cheshire Nantwich Parish Church Scout Group.

Credo in unum Deum (soloists and chorus)
Crucifixus (soprano)
Et resurrexit (soloists and chorus)
Preludio religioso
Sanctus (soloists and chorus)
O salutaris hostia (soprano)
Agnus Dei (contralto and chorus)

It was as a composer of comic opera that Rossini became famous. Indeed, as such he came to be considered as a national hero in his native Italy, and enjoyed no less a reputation throughout the rest of Europe. However, the composer's total output of nearly forty operas was concentrated into the comparatively short period of nineteen years. His last opera, *William Tell*, was written in 1829 when Rossini was only 37. After that date he wrote a great deal of religious music and about 180 piano works. He turned completely from the world of opera because of the uninformed scribbles of the critics, and the growing conviction that he was becoming old-fashioned because he longed for the return of the true bel canto singer.

The *Petite Messe Solennelle* was Rossini's last major work. It was first performed in 1864. The work received the praise of critics and public alike. One critic described it as the "supreme manifestation of Rossini's genius", while another declared it to be a "landmark in the history of religious music." Rossini's own feelings about the Mass are reflected in a footnote he added to the autograph manuscript: "Good God, there it is complete, this poor little Mass. Is it really sacred music, or is it merely abominable music? I was born for opera buffa as Thou well knowest. Little skill, a little heart, and that is all. So be thou blessed and admit me to Paradise. G. Rossini. Passy. 1863."

Rossini's original intention had been to score the work for one piano and harmonium. While working on the piece he had the idea of adding a second piano, to reinforce the chorus during the louder passages. Because of the rather superfluous nature of the second piano part it is often omitted, as in this evening's performance.

The most surprising aspect in Rossini's setting of the Mass is the inclusion of the harmonium. The aging composer had a reputation for being very conservative and his use of this nineteenth century equivalent of the 'synthesiser' would have been considered out of character. However, Rossini had recognised the enormous range of expression available on the French harmonium and used it to great effect. His foresight in this was to be matched by such composers as Franck, Saint-Saens, Widor, Berlioz and Liszt.

The simplicity of Rossini's instrumentation left the public clamouring for a fully orchestrated version of the work. Rossini was against this reworking of the Mass. However, wanting "to prevent others doing it" he did finally give in to pressure, but he would not allow this version to be performed during his lifetime, and after his death it was soon forgotten.

Rossini wrote of the *Petite Mess Solennelle*: "My main ambition was to leave a final legacy which might serve as an example of how to write for the voice." In this blend of austerity and joy Rossini fulfilled his ambition leaving us a work that combines moments of operatic grandeur and excitement with great beauty.