

Nantwich Choral Society

Messa di Gloria

Giacomo Puccini



Alexander Wall – tenor

Mark Holland – baritone

William Nicholson – organ / piano

John Naylor – conductor

St Mary's Church, Nantwich

Saturday 29 June 2013, 7.30 pm

Welcome!

As chairman of the Nantwich Choral Society, it is with very great pleasure that I welcome you all most warmly to this evening's performance of Puccini's setting of the Mass, his Messe di Gloria followed by some well-known opera choruses and duets.

As one of the leading amateur choirs of the North West the Nantwich Choral Society is proud to be celebrating its 40th Anniversary year. We have grown and flourished from early beginnings as an educational local authority evening class in 1972 into the distinguished choral society that exists today and 40 years on we celebrate a record membership of 100+ mixed choral voices. Under the inspirational guiding baton of our highly respected Music Director, John Naylor, and our accomplished accompanist Simon Russell, we strive to keep the choral tradition alive by singing great choral works and by having a varied and expanding repertoire of music, some familiar and some less so. We enjoy a fine choral reputation and excellent critiques of our performances in Nantwich, the wider Cheshire area and in Chester Cathedral.

This is our last major concert in this our celebratory year. We have already performed two iconic pieces of choral work, Handel's Messiah in St Mary's parish church, Nantwich, and JS Bach's St Matthew Passion in Chester Cathedral, without doubt one of the greatest pieces of choral music ever written.

The resources required to stage these performances are considerable. The choir was fortunate to secure substantial funding from the Arts Council England, for the performance in Chester Cathedral, and we wish to acknowledge too the receipt of legacies, sponsorships, grants and donations which help us to maintain and develop our musical standards, for without such generosity it would not be possible for our choral society to have the opportunity of taking part in, or for our audience to listen to these wonderful choral works.

Elizabeth Lea

PART 1

Messa di Gloria – Puccini

Interval

PART II

Choir: Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves, Verdi

Tenor solo: To be announced

Baritone solo: To be announced

Choir and Tenor: Chorus of Wedding Guests from Donizetti, Lucia di
Lammermoor

Tenor and Baritone: Duet from 'The Pearl Fishers', Bizet

Choir: Bridal Procession, from 'Lohengrin' , Wagner

Tenor solo: To be announced

Baritone solo: To be announced

Choir: Easter Hymn from Mascagni, Cavalliera rusticana

Messa Di Gloria – Giacomo Puccini

(1858 -1924)

Kyrie –Gloria –Credo – Sanctus – Benedictus - Agnus Dei

On 12th July 1952 at a Grant Park concert in Chicago, the world heard the first performance for 72 years of a 'lost' Puccini masterpiece. The master of *La Bohème*, *Tosca* and *Madame Butterfly* had composed a Mass as his graduation exercise from the Instituto Musicale Pacini in Lucca, Tuscany and it had not been performed since the first complete performance there in 1880.

Most programme notes on the *Messa di Gloria* will tell of the excitement of its rediscovery, of it being a lost treasure and contain all of the intrigue and publicity that accompanied the Chicago performance and the notes by Mills Music and Ricordi on the scores that they then published. Indeed it had not been performed and anyone hearing the piece tonight would rightly wonder why not. They would want to follow the journey of Fra. Dante del Fiorentino who purchased an old copy in Lucca and believed it was the original lost score. In fact, that original was in the possession of the Puccini family and should probably not be thought of as lost or disappeared. It is more likely that Puccini, forever smitten by opera after hearing Verdi's *Aida* in 1876, considered it a curio, perhaps a summary of a style that he had left behind and a farewell to composing liturgical music.

Listening to his own Mass performed would have been enough to persuade Puccini that his musical future was in the theatre. So, rather than fill lines with mysteries and detective stories, let's enjoy the music. For it is not music that Puccini had abandoned for opera, just the vocation of writing church music. The themes of this mass recur in his operas, for instance the forte endorsement of the plea of *Christe eleison* is employed in *Edgar*. The opening of the Gloria foreshadows *Inno a Diana* and the light, lyrical setting is far from the solid, ecclesiastical masses of Haydn and Beethoven.

Puccini's setting of the Gloria takes up over half the Mass and is why the work has acquired the title it has. Strictly, such a title would present a work excluding a Credo, but Puccini composed a whole mass. The title *Messa a quattro voci* is used sometimes, but that loses so much of the unique qualities of this composition. Like Verdi's *Requiem* this work is one of a kind.

The 'Gloria' drives forward; it is not set with passages of quiet reflection and gentle orchestration, and you are never longer than a few bars from the next colourful tune. Opening with a fugue for SA then TB, the whole choir then repeats 'Gloria in excelsis' *ff* punctuated by staccato brass. With every attention to the words, the sopranos lead into the piano section of 'et in terra pax' and the accompaniment into the explosive

'Laudamus te' complete with a climbing, running, TB figure that repeats once more than the etiquette of liturgical music dictates.

The tenor soloist sings 'Gratias agimus' over an independent accompaniment, off on its own narrative path. After a reprise of the opening theme, a solemn 'Qui tollis' grows into a dramatic, sprightly march for 'deprecationem nostram, suscipe' and after the traditional fugue for 'cum sancto spiritu' the main theme returns and intersperses with the fugue subject to the 'Amen.'

Beethoven uses the same form, weaving 'Amen' with the main fugue text and repeating it, but Puccini decorates the words with an intriguing operatic style. Liturgical masses by contrast have the words to the fore, pointing you to the truth by the music.

The 'Credo' was a self-contained work for two choirs originally but did not survive in that form. A bold statement of belief opens and the unison singing lends the feel of one person stating their faith with bravado and a flourish. Generally set in blocks, the whole opening section retains the theme of certainty and assurance with audacity.

The solo tenor, hovering over the hushed chorus dramatises the incarnation, ending with a confident 'et homo factus est'.

The crucifixion is handed to a G minor bass solo, rising from sotto voce into a forte 'passus' and back before the accompaniment dramatically brings Jesus back to life (et resurrexit) in a swirling allegro and the basses lead the chorus in celebration of the resurrection and ascension in a triumphant E flat major.

Each of the 'I believe in' (Credo) statements then has the same rising crescendo and falling diminuendo but none more important than before the short 'et vitam venturi' climax.

The 'Sanctus' and 'Benedictus' are simple statements without elaboration, both ending with short, clamorous 'Hosannas'. The 'Agnus Dei' is another idea Puccini used elsewhere, the bored heroine in Manon Lescaut sings it over her morning toilette! Here the tenor and the bass are given the line, first as solo voices and then as a duet with links from the chorus to a final pianissimo 'Dona nobis pacem', its triplets echoed by the accompaniment.

Puccini was only 18 years old when he wrote this splendid piece. It bursts with engaging musical ideas, and with the benefit of hindsight it is no surprise that the composer went on to achieve fortune and an enduring fame through his composition of some of the most popular operas of all time.

Nantwich Choral Society

Honorary Members: Joy Roberts, Andrew Mildinhall, Jean Atkin

Music Director: John Naylor

Accompanist: Simon Russell

Soprano

Anne Barnard
Amanda Brewer
Jan Brown
Tracey Coleman
Glenda Colemere
Gail Corfield
Rita Davies
Ann Ferguson
Marlene Flannery
Kay Foster
Margaret Harvey
Rosemary Jones
Bronwyn Kelly
Helen Kerr
Sheila Luke
Maire Pedder
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Imogen Taylor
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Rachael Hendry
Lena Hogben
Vanessa Layfield
Elizabeth Lea
Geraldine Leighton
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Graham Harbage
Patrick Hay
Wal Kaye
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Richard Percival
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ALEXANDER WALL – tenor

Alexander Wall was born in Leicester. He started singing as a chorister at Westminster Abbey, and was the first recipient of the Sir David Willcocks medal. Having won a music scholarship to Uppingham School, he furthered his studies at the Royal Northern College of Music at undergraduate and postgraduate level, which he completed with distinction in summer, 2007. He studied there with Peter Alexander Wilson. Currently Alexander is working with Arwel Treharne Morgan. Roles at the RNCM include Lensky (Eugene Onegin) and Schoolmaster (The Cunning Little Vixen). His postgraduate studies were generously sponsored by The Oglesby Charitable Trust.

Alexander has performed extensively at home and abroad with many distinguished companies. These include The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden; English National Opera; Grange Park Opera; Carl Rosa Opera. In Europe, he has worked in Holland for The Netherlands Opera and Nationale Reisopera, in France with Opera de Nancy and in Norway with Den Norske Opera. In 2008 Alexander played Fenton (Falstaff), on tour for The Opera Project, and Pasek (The Cunning Little Vixen), at The Longborough Festival.

Eminent conductors that Alexander has worked with include Sir Antonio Pappano, Lorin Maazel, Sir Mark Elder, Semyon Bychkov, Esa-Pekka Salonen and Thomas Hengelbrock. Leading stage directors he has worked with include Sir David McVicar, Jonathan Miller, Tim Albery, and Moshe Leiser & Patrice Caurier.

Alexander performs regularly as a soloist with some of the UK's finest ensembles and choral societies in a number of prestigious venues. Concert highlights include Mozart's Requiem with The Northern Sinfonia (Halsey) at The Sage, Gateshead; Handel's Messiah at Westminster Abbey, Darmstadtium in Darmstadt (Seeliger), Ripon Cathedral, Blackburn Cathedral; Ein Lakai (Der Rosenkavalier) at The Bridgewater Hall with The Halle Orchestra (Elder); Mozart's Great Mass with Manchester Camerata Orchestra and Bolton Choral Union, and Bach's B Minor Mass at Sheffield Cathedral.

For The Royal Opera House, Alexander performed as An Apprentice (*Die Meistersinger Von Nürnberg*) in Graham Vick's 2011 revival under the baton of Sir Antonio Pappano. Future plans there include extra chorus in *Don Carlo* and *Les Vêpres Siciliennes*.

In April 2012 Alexander made his London recital debut with Schubert's *Winterreise* in Hall One, King's Place with the pianist Jamie Thompson.

Alexander sang with NCS last year's Summer Concert which included Mozart's *Coronation Mass and Vespers*.

MARK HOLLAND – Baritone

Mark was born in Salford and after education at Rossall School he studied with John Cameron at the Royal Northern College of Music. He was awarded scholarships by the Royal Society of Arts and received a grant from the Peter Moores Foundation, enabling him to study in Italy with Roberto Benaglio. Mark Holland's early years were as a company principal with Welsh National Opera.

He has subsequently developed a distinguished international career, appearing in many of the leading baritone roles with the principal leading opera companies in Europe, America and Australasia.

With recent performances as Giorgio Germont **LA TRAVIATA** in Graham Vick's production for Birmingham Opera Company and also for the Polish National Opera; the title role **RIGOLETTO** and his role debut as **GIANNI SCHICCHI** in Koblenz; Andrej **TRE SESTRI** at the Hamburgische Staatsoper; and Balstrode **PETER GRIMES** in Modena, Ferrara and Reggio-Emilia, Mark Holland has consolidated his position as one of Britain's most sought-after baritones.

NCS audiences will remember with pleasure his performances in Elijah in 2005 and at our Opera Gala Evening in 2008.

WILLIAM NICHOLSON – Organ and Piano

The Rochdale Observer once said, 'Clearly one of the rising stars of the younger generation of organ virtuosos...' William Nicholson refutes this at every opportunity!

William was born and raised in Hexham, Northumberland. His musical education began as a chorister in Hexham Abbey Choir with organ studies on the Abbey's famously influential instrument with the then Director of Music, John Green. He went to study the organ full-time at the Royal Northern College of Music with Margaret Philips, Matthew Owens, Gordon Stewart, and Darius Battiwalla, where he participated in master classes with Gillian Weir, David Briggs, David Sanger, Naji Hakim, and Jacques van Oortmerssen, amongst others.

Since his studies he has been sometime Organ Scholar at Chester Cathedral, and currently is organist at St John the Divine, Kennington in Lambeth. He has also been accompanist to many choirs, including the Philharmonic Choir of Manchester and the Halton Singers, and currently the Vasari Singers. William accompanies The Lydian Singers with whom he has had the pleasure of visiting many cathedrals at home and abroad.

William considers music to be his greatest 'hobby'; providing music and expressing the liturgy through the organ's versatility, or singing as he does in great and powerful works with the London Symphony Chorus and the Rinaldo Consort.

He has many other passions; chiefly both theology and being on wild mountains, but also maps, fine art, the weather, the north, real ale, pubs, geology, trees, photographs, conservation, and large amounts of reflective thought. William is married to Flora, and his day-job is as Assistant to the Minor Canons of Westminster Abbey where he also plays the organ from time to time.

JOHN NAYLOR – conductor

As conductor, singer and organist, John combines extensive performance experience in world-class choirs with a lifelong passionate interest in choral music and its performance. Following a successful business career he now devotes most of his activities to conducting and choir development. His original training was as a choral scholar at St John's College, Cambridge with the great Dr. George Guest after keyboard studies with Conrad Eden at Durham Cathedral where he was a chorister, a music scholarship at Rossall School and singing studies with Wilfrid Brown and Lyndon van der Pump from The Royal College of Music.

He subsequently became a professional member of the Chapel Royal Choir of St Peter ad Vincula at H.M. Tower of London and The Monteverdi Choir and Louis Halsey Singers, appearing at The Proms, The South Bank, The Aldeburgh Festival and in numerous broadcasts and recordings. He has sung in the cathedral choirs of Carlisle, Christ Church Oxford and Chester where he can still be occasionally spotted on the back row!

John has been Director of The Lydian Singers since founding the choir in 1980. They are now one of the leading chamber choirs in the North West and have performed extensively in the North West, Spain, France, Italy and in most of the cathedrals in Great Britain, often returning several times by invitation.

John was appointed Music Director of Nantwich Choral Society in September 2005 for whom he has now conducted highly acclaimed performances of works in the mainstream choral repertoire.

Recent engagements have included Vaughan Williams Sea Symphony and The Lark Ascending with the Northern Concordia Orchestra, Mozart Coronation Mass and Vespers in Macon and Nantwich, Messiah with The 18th Century Sinfonia, Coventry cathedral with The Open University Chapel Choir and with the Lydian Singers works by Buxtehude, Monteverdi and Mozart followed by Bangor and Lichfield cathedrals and a

new chamber orchestra version of Andrew Mildinhall's 'Even Such is Time' with The Lydian Singers.

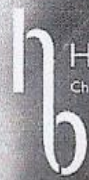
John's 2013 engagements include Bach's St Matthew Passion in Chester Cathedral with NCS and The 18th Century Sinfonia, Karl Jenkins 'The Armed Man' and Puccini Messe di Gloria with Nantwich Choral Society, St Alban's and Peterborough cathedrals with The Lydian Singers, Duruflé Requiem in Coventry Cathedral with The Lydian Singers, Mozart Mass in F with The Lydian Ensemble at The Lymm Festival and Guildford cathedral with The Open University Chapel Choir.

 **MICHAEL VERNON**
photography

Wedding Photographer

Leighton Hall Farm
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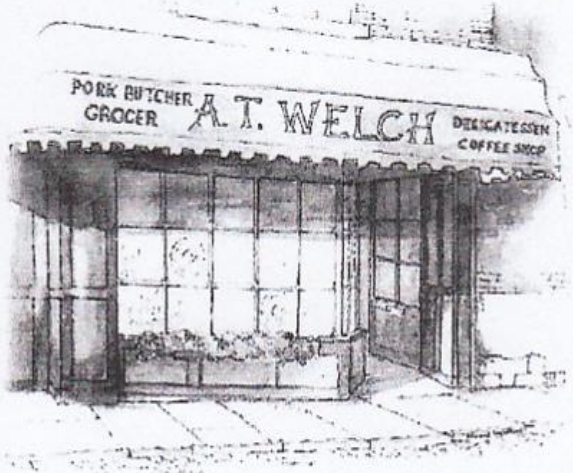
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or Mr Ola Ness, Musical Director,
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Singing Day – St Oswald's Malpas
English Church Music

9 November 2013 – St Mary's, Nantwich
Handel: Israel in Egypt

21 December 2013– St Mary's, Nantwich
Family Christmas Concert

11 January 2014– St Mary's, Nantwich
Come and Sing: ***Brahms Requiem***

Sunday 23 March 2014 – Nantwich Civic Hall
Elgar: ***From the Bavarian Highlands, Enigma Variations***
Coleridge Taylor: ***Hiawatha's Wedding Feast***

28 June 2014 – St Mary's Nantwich
***Contemporary Choral Music by Lauridsen, Whitacre,
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