



President – Patricia Parkes

**Conductor – Michael Cayton**

## **Music by Will Todd**

**Mass in Blue**

**Songs of Peace**

**Amazing Grace**

*Soprano soloist Helena Raeburn*

**Saturday 25 February 2023**

**Clarendon Muse Concert Hall**

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# Welcome from the Chair



It is lovely to be at The Muse singing Will Todd's music tonight. We were here a few years ago singing Mass in Blue and we thought it would be good to revisit this fabulous piece of music. I hope you enjoy it.

Please save the date for our summer concert at Sarratt Village Hall on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> June.

Lyndsay Ward  
Chair

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A small group of singers from the Chiltern Choir, *The Chiltern Singers*, is available to sing at events: Weddings, funerals, Club functions etc.

All proceeds go to Chiltern Choir funds.

Contact John Haslam: email (preferred) [chilternsingers@chilternchoir.org.uk](mailto:chilternsingers@chilternchoir.org.uk) or phone (01494 724125).

# Programme

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## **Songs of Peace**      *Will Todd*

1. *Requiem*
2. *Precious Moment*
3. *Just As I Am*
4. *Ave Verum*
5. *A Song Of Peace*
6. *Into The Stars*

## **Amazing Grace**

*Words by John Newton (1725 – 1807)*

*Arranged by Will Todd*

## **Mass in Blue**      *Will Todd*

1. *Kyrie*
2. *Gloria*
3. *Credo*
4. *Sanctus*
5. *Benedictus*
6. *Agnus Dei*

## Programme Notes

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# Songs of Peace

Written in memory of the composer's mother, Will Todd's *Songs of Peace* is a six-movement work about love and loss. Two of the movements are scored for upper voices. Although it is not a conventional Requiem, it might be appropriate in a memorial context, but should by no means be confined to it; in many ways, it is a very life-affirming work, characterised by Todd's recognisable jazz-infused harmonic language, memorable melodies, and powerful and personal texts.

## **Composer's Note**

The overall structure of *Songs of Peace* gradually made sense as I worked on individual movements; I didn't originally set out to write a six-movement piece, but these various choral songs seem to work very well together and share a certain atmosphere. The themes are peace, eternity, and love. It is a work in which I remember my mother, Iris Todd, for all the wonderful things she gave me, especially a lifelong interest in choral music and worship. She adored the *Ave Verum* text which I set in the fourth movement, and also the hymn *Just As I Am*, which she always said she would like at her funeral, and indeed this version in a solo piano arrangement was what I played on that occasion. The voices feel like a natural addition. There is a carol for the second movement, and a soft, ethereal 'In Paradisum' section at the end, entitled *Into the Stars*. The first movement is the opening section of the Requiem Mass, and the *Song of Peace* (movement five), like the second and sixth movements, is a setting of my own text.

## Amazing Grace

John Newton's *Amazing Grace* was composed in 1772, and has become one of the best-known hymn tunes of all time, particularly in the United States, where it is used both for secular and sacred purposes. Will Todd arranged the hymn for the Choir of St Martin in the Fields and, while it employs a jazz harmonies and a jazz backing group, the hymn has lost none of its tenderness.

## Mass in Blue (*Jazz Mass*)

Written in 2003 in response to a commission by Hertfordshire Chorus, and originally premiered under the title *Jazz Mass*, Will Todd's *Mass in Blue* is a brilliant blend of driving jazz grooves and clear, strong, choral writing against which the solo piano and solo soprano voice weave and blend in a delightful aural tapestry. The work reflects not only the composer's love of jazz music and his admiration of jazz performers, but also his own experience as an improviser. It also allows Todd to make use of his extensive choral skills which he deploys so effectively in works such as the oratorios *The Burning Road* (Op. 10) and *Saint Cuthbert* (Op. 7) or the chorus writing of his opera *The Blackened Man*. It is a confident work by a composer who understands and responds to the jazz idiom, making free use of the 12-bar blues sequence (which has been fundamental in the development of jazz music) as well as more-complex harmonic processes.

The *Kyrie* opens with an energetic cadenza for the trio, which builds into the first set tempo of the work. Over this the first vocal entry is heard, a bluesy theme reminiscent of negro spirituals and therefore apt for the text *Kyrie Eleison* ('Lord have mercy'). Gradually other lines join the initial melody until the full choir is singing. On a move to the sub-dominant B flat the choir ecstatically

bursts forth with *Christe Eleison*, and as this music subsides we hear the soprano enter on a soulful melody with a strong improvised feel, which builds over the return of the original key of F minor. The music of the *Kyrie Eleison* is repeated with the soloist interwoven around the vocal lines in a virtuosic display. The movement slows and closes on a thrilling F-minor 11 chord.

The *Gloria* is set up with a fanfare which punctuates the whole movement. From the moment the choir enters there is an uplifting rhythmic drive to this setting. In the central section of the *Gloria* a pulsating 5/8 time is set up which gradually builds until a recapitulation of the opening material brings the movement to a close.

The *Credo* features the soprano in a colourful 12-bar blues in 12/8 time. There is a strong gospel feel with the choir repeating lines from the soloist and humming soft backing harmony. Again in three sections, the first blues part gives way to a more sombre section at the *Crucifixus*, and after *Et Sepultus Est* ('and he was buried') a piano solo leads into a blazing depiction of the moment of resurrection. The *Et Resurrexit* is set with a scorching up-tempo swing which eventually cuts back into the 12/8 as the movement builds to a thrilling climax.

Like the *Gloria*, the *Sanctus* is set for the choir and band without the soloist. It is a beautiful, slow ballad set up initially on the piano. The movement provides a welcome period of tranquillity and reflection after the sheer energy of the previous three movements.

The *Benedictus* begins with solo double bass over which the choir sings a theme which builds up from the basses through the rest of the voices. This music is gradually invaded by a new, more driving beat and the solo voice begins to weave into the texture once again. This funky riff gradually takes over and the music emerges

into a powerful Hosanna section with punching brass and a jubilant choral sound.

The *Agnus Dei* grows out of the dying echoes of the Hosanna with a haunting soprano ballad accompanied by piano. In the stirring *maestoso* which follows, we hear the main themes of the work; once again, the strong 12-bar blues harmony underpins the texture. A huge climactic entry from the choir subsides into a gentle A-minor section in which intricate choral lines are woven over a simple, repeated chordal structure. After another big build, this time with the chorus featured, the music returns to the opening ballad theme, the soprano now accompanied by soft choir. This is a substantial movement and is more than beautiful – it is painful, plaintive, a cry for mercy and a prayer for peace.

Traditionally the Mass would end here, but in another dramatic master-stroke Will Todd leaves the altos hanging on a soft E after the last chord of the *Agnus Dei*. The air of expectation grows as the sopranos softly recapitulate the *Credo* theme. Gradually the music builds with the soloist entering and then the tenors and basses. Suddenly the driving 12/8 beat of the *Credo* is forcing the music forward as the choir sing *Et Expecto Resurrectionem* ('we look for the resurrection') and the music comes back to the key in which the work began, F minor. The emphatic final chords of the work leave the listener not in quiet contemplation but jerked forward into praise and belief. *Credo Amen!*

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# **Performing Tonight:**

## **Michael Cayton, Conductor**

Michael Cayton has been Musical Director of the Chiltern Choir since 2003. Since then he has led the choir in a wide variety of works from Purcell to Eric Whitacre.

Lockdown brought new challenges and although the Choir was unable to meet in person it continued with weekly Zoom rehearsals and the creation and broadcast of virtual concerts. During this period Michael was kept extra busy recording sessions for BBC Radio 4 and St. Martin in the Fields. Michael is also Director of Music at Watford Philharmonic Society where he is into his 8<sup>th</sup> season. During that time, he has conducted performances of Britten's *War Requiem*, Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* and Bliss' *Morning Heroes* to commemorate the centenary of the end of the first world war.

Since 2003, Michael has been the Director of Music at St John's Wood Church in London, where he conducts both the critically acclaimed professional choir and the successful community Chamber Choir. Having attended the Royal College of Music, where he studied piano, organ, and conducting, Michael won the Hilda Deane Anderson prize for conducting and improvisation, and became the first Millennium Organ Scholar at the Royal Hospital in Chelsea. As well as conducting, Michael is in demand as a pianist and organist, with regular appearances in Central London venues, especially at St. Martin in the Fields. He lives in Watford and is married with two boys.

## **Helena Raeburn, Soprano soloist**

Helena is a vocalist who loves performing in different styles including Musical Theatre, Classical, Folk, Pop/Rock/Soul and Jazz. She is an experienced Choral Singer and is a member of the St. John's Wood church choir. She has also performed with Gareth Malone's 'Voices' and choral group 'Celeste'.

She trained on the Musical Theatre Course at the Royal Academy of Music having studied Classical Singing at the Birmingham Conservatoire and Music at the University of Birmingham.

Helena has worked as a Musician with the Royal Shakespeare Company and sang for their 'King and Country' cycle which toured to London, China and New York. She recently sang as one of the Quartet in 'The Comedy of Errors' at the Barbican in London.

Other performing experience includes session work, concerts, musicals, operas, plays and cabaret. She toured the UK with the Fingask Follies, performed in the Thursford Christmas Spectacular and played Fairy Sponge in the Oxford Playhouse panto.

She is also one of the vocal tutors for Birmingham-based Choir ExCathedra, and delivers their award-winning education programmes in schools and hospitals.

## Band:

Piano            Simon Howat  
Bass             Damon Burrows  
Drums           Scott Chapman

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Caroline Bartlett	Mary Bungard
Jenny Gorsuch	Gabrielle Fisher
Jill Haslam	Christine Guy
Sue Kesteven	Barbara Johnson
Sarah Moreton	Gillian Proctor
Beverley Small	Lyndsay Ward
Gill Watson	

## **Altos**

Cathy Amos	Sue Canderton
Ana de'Ath	Jan Ellis
Rita Fryer	Philippa Goss
Clare Hearnshaw	Helen Heenan
Anne Keyworth	Charlotte Kohnhorst
Cheryl Marshall	Miriam Morgan
Liz Pendered	Gillian Pugh
Maggie Shrive	Marian Wax
Beryl Whittaker	

## **Tenors**

Andy Etchells	Gijs Crone
Isabel Walker	Mike Currey

## **Basses**

Simon Boulcott	Paul Davies
John Haslam	Stuart Marshall
Martin Robinson	Richard Watson
Renny Thomas	

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