

S^t John's Wood Church Choir

in concert with

The Chiltern Choir, and Orchestra

A Celebration of Choral Music, featuring

The Way Through the Woods

by Michael Cayton



Sunday May 18, 2025

A Welcome from the Vicar

Welcome to this evening's concert, which marks an exciting new venture for our church and for our community: the launch of the St John's Wood Choral Music Trust. The Trust is a newly formed charity, created to support the making of choral music in the English church tradition in St John's Wood. "Making" covers composition as well as performance. The intention is to build up a significant capital sum from legacies and donations, the income from which will be used to support this musical tradition throughout the community. Obviously, the place where choral music is performed week by week (to a very high standard!) is the parish church, and that is also where newly composed choral music sometimes gets heard for the first time; but the charity is also intended to range beyond the church – looking to encourage the composition and performance of choral music in the English church tradition in schools, in other places of worship, and in other institutions within our parish.

It is both a great pleasure, and very fitting, that tonight's concert includes Michael Cayton's piece *A Walk through the Woods*, and that it will be sung by the Chiltern Choir (who gave the first performance last year).



Warm thanks to those who have generously sponsored this evening's concert. Please enjoy the music, stay for refreshments in the Church Hall afterwards – and give generously to the Trust.

Anders Bergquist

Anders Bergquist
Vicar of St John's Wood

Programme
St John's Wood Church Choir

Bach – *Lobet Den Herrn BWV 230*

Bruckner – *Os Justi*

Palestrina – *Missa Brevis Agnus Dei*

Naylor – *Vox Dicentis*

Whitacre – *Sleep*

————— INTERVAL —————

Cayton – *The Way Through The Woods*

with The Chiltern Choir

and The Chiltern Chamber Orchestra

leader Anastasia Stahlmann

Mezzo-soprano – Helen Stanley

The Way Through the Woods

Composer's notes

The Way Through the Woods intersperses poetry with first-hand accounts of environmental issues, many taken from the BBC news archive. 'Spring' deals with forest fires, 'Summer' with hurricanes, and 'Autumn' with deforestation. Each movement contains a verse from the Extinction Rebellion song *I'm sorry my Friends*, which warns the listener of the danger presented by these environmental concerns.

For 'Winter', the darkest moment of the piece, I make a link with nuclear radiation through Anaïs Tondeur's first-hand account of the damage done to nature following the accident at Chernobyl. This, coupled with the Malmsbury Scholar's poem *Storm and Destruction*, creates a new meaning, warning of nuclear catastrophe. However, the overriding message of the piece is one of hope and of nature's capacity to heal.

The work opens with a solo violin playing the dissonant interval (minor 2nd), followed by a slightly less dissonant major 2nd, leading to a major triad in the 2nd inversion. I wanted to take the listener from a harsh dissonance to a serene consonance. The final section sets Swinburne's poem, *For Winter's rains and ruins are over*, in the form of a chorale. The text speaks that at the end of the darkest Winter, frosts will disappear and, blossom by blossom, the Spring will return.

Texts are taken from a variety of sources. The opening movement uses the Sanskrit *Look to this Day* and the Extinction Rebellion song. The piece is based around the four seasons; Spring is based on Housman's *Loveliest of trees*, and Summer on the traditional *Summer is icummen in*. *Fall, Leaves Fall* is a modern poem taken from a poetry website along with *Vanishing, Saving* which form Autumn and Winter. The authors are not named on the website and I would be delighted to learn who wrote these so I can credit them accordingly.

The title of the piece, *The Way Through the Woods*, is borrowed from Kipling's poem. This poem has always had a particular resonance for me; on my visits to Yorkshire I often walk along what was, until a few years ago, the York to Harrogate road (A59). The road was straightened and enlarged and the old road abandoned. The landowner dug up the tarmac and planted trees, and the area is now a small but beautiful woodland. As Kipling wrote, "You would never know there was once a road through the woods". We see time and time again how nature has the capacity to heal itself, if only we let it.

— *Michael Cayton*

The Way Through the Woods

Prologue

Look to this day for it is like
The very life of life.
In its brief course lie all
The realities and truths of existence.
The joy of growth, the splendour of action,
The glory of power.
Look well, therefore, to this day.
Such is the salutation of the dawn.

Kalidasa

I'm sorry my Friends,
I didn't want to stop you
When you were having such a fine time.
But this is an emergency,
Your house is all on fire.
And if we do not rise up now,
All this will turn to ashes.

*©Blythe Pepino (Extinction Rebellion)
Used with the kind permission of the author*

Spring

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bough,
And stands about the woodland ride
Wearing white for Eastertide.

A.E. Housman

A wisp of smoke springs from a small flame at
the end of a match. The entire forest holds its
breath as it falls to the mossy floor. Black acrid
smoke dances through the air, burning all life.

Anon

Vanishing! Saving!
Standing in nature's way!
Life-saving cures wiped out.

Anon

I'm sorry my Friends,
I didn't want to trouble you,
When you were having such a hard time.
But this is an emergency,
Your house is all on fire.
And if we do not rise up now,
We soon will all be burning.

Blythe Pepino

Summer

Sumer is icumen in, Lhude sing cuccu!
Groweth sed and bloweth med and spring the woode nu,
Sing cuccu!
Awe bleteth after lomb, lhouth after calver cu.
Bulluc sterteth, bucke verteth
Murie sing cuccu! Sing cuccu!

Traditional

"Storm Sandy took us by surprise. We didn't expect to be hit hard, and we didn't evacuate. We had to climb up on our roof to get away from the flood. We were scared. It was a terrible night. Many people in our neighbourhood lost their lives."

Anon

I'm sorry my Friends,
I didn't want to frighten you,
When you were having such a fine time.
But this is an emergency,
The waters are all climbing.
And so we have to rise up now
Or we will soon be drowning

Blythe Pepino

Autumn

Fall, leaves, fall: die, flowers, away;
Lengthen night and shorten day;
Every leaf speaks bliss to me
Fluttering from the autumn tree.

Emily Brontë

"Clearing the forest the machine operator slowly pushed over the trees. I picked up the sloths that fell from the canopy. Fourteen quickly turned to two hundred, the sloth lover's dream come true. All to be released soon, although a new patch of forest is slated soon to be cleared."

Anon

I'm sorry my Friends,
That we have all been arguing,
And now we're nearly out of time.
But this is an emergency,
There'll be no food for eating.
And so we have to rise up now,
And change our way of thinking
And join the rebellion.

Blythe Pepino

Winter

Frozen in the present of the accident, the land comes to a standstill. Trees do not decay. The silhouettes of plants are unchanged, caesium-137 is at work.

©Anaïs Tondeur

*(From the Chernobyl Herbarium,
by Michael Marder and Anaïs Tondeur.
Used with kind permission of the author.)*

Come, come thou bleak December wind,
And blow the dry leaves from the tree!
Flash, like a Love-thought, thro' me, Death
And take a Life that wearies me.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Storm and destruction shattering
Strike fear upon the world.
The winds are out and through high heaven
Their Bacchanals are hurled.
Their league is broken,
Burst the girth,
And launched their fury
On the earth.
The Sirius shines no more at all.
And heaven is hung with blackest pall.

Yet through the summits of the day
Flashes afar the livid Levin.
And cataracts of pallid fire
Pour from the crests,
From the toppling crests of heaven.
Struggling with clouds the mountains stand
And blow the dry leaves from the tree!
The dark sea masses on the strand.

A Scholar of Malmesbury

They shut the road through the woods
Seventy years ago.
Weather and rain have undone it again,
And now you would never know
There was once a road through the woods
Before they planted the trees.

Rudyard Kipling

For winter's rains and ruins are over,
And all the season of snows and sins;
The days dividing lover and lover,
The light that loses,
The night that wins.
And time remembered is grief forgotten,
And frosts are slain and flowers begotten,
And in green underwood and cover
Blossom by blossom the spring begins.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

This Evening's Performers

Michael Cayton — Conductor

Michael has held the position of Director of Music at St John's Wood Church for over twenty years. Born in Burnley, he trained at the Royal Military School of Music at Kneller Hall before serving in the band of the Grenadier Guards as a trumpeter and pianist for state occasions, performing at Buckingham Palace, Windsor Castle, and St James's Palace. He then studied at the Royal College of Music, on a scholarship awarded by the Worshipful Company of Fishmongers, gaining his ARCM and BMus and winning the Hilda Anderson Deane Prize for conducting and improvisation. While staying on to pursue postgraduate *répétiteur* studies he was appointed the first Millennium organ Scholar at the Royal Hospital Chelsea, where he continued his organ studies with Ian Curror.

Michael made his debut as an organist at the Royal Festival Hall in 1988, since when he has been in demand as a recitalist and accompanist, appearing up and down the country and in Europe, with notable London appearances at St Martin-in-the-Fields, Westminster Abbey, Blackheath Concert Halls, and the Wigmore Hall. During his tenure as Bedford Borough Organist and Director of Music at St Paul's Parish Church he built up a flourishing concert scene involving local professionals and amateurs.

Since settling in London in 2003 he has simultaneously held the posts of Director of Music at St John's Wood Church, organist at Belsize Square Synagogue, and conductor of the Chiltern Choir. In 2014 he was appointed principal conductor of Watford Philharmonic Society following the society's thrilling performance of Britten's *War Requiem*. He has broadcast on Radio 2, Radio 3, Radio 5 Live, and the World Service, and he has been organist for BBC 1's *Songs of Praise*. His church music is published by Redemptorist, the responsorial psalms now a staple of parish churches up and down the country.

Helen Stanley — Mezzo-Soprano

Helen studied at the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama, where she won several prizes including the Seligman Award for Excellence. Her solo concert highlights include J.S. Bach's *St John Passion* and *Mass in B Minor* with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* with the Southbank Sinfonia, Daniel-Lesur's *Cantique des Cantiques* with the BBC Symphony Chorus, and Schmitt's *Tragédie de Salomé* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. She has also appeared in opera galas with Welsh National Opera and Mid Wales Opera.

Helen's recent opera projects include the UK tour of *Borka: The Goose with No Feathers*, an opera for children featuring puppets and animation. She has also appeared as the Lay Sister in Grange Park Opera's film of *Suor Angelica*, and toured the Netherlands in a production of *Das Wunder der Heliane* with the Nederlandse Reisopera. Most recently, she was involved in a large-scale arena tour of *Aida* across Germany, which will resume in Europe in 2025.

Other recent opera projects have included *The Power of Paternal Love* by Stradella, in its first performance since 1678, and *Gods of the Game*, a new opera written to celebrate the 2022 World Cup, broadcast by Sky Arts. Other roles have included L'Opinion Publique (*Orphée ux Enfers*), Juno (*Semele*), Isabella (*L'Italiana in Algeri*), Witch (*Hansel and Gretel*), Popova (*The Bear*) and Geneviève (*Pelléas et Mélisande*).

Helen has also premiered works at Grimeborn, Tête à Tête, and the Sage, Gateshead (now The Glasshouse), as well as site-specific performances of new music at the Foundling Museum, Greenwich Observatory and the National Portrait Gallery. She is particularly interested in performing the works of under-represented female composers of the past, and recently appeared as Mary in the UK premiere and subsequent revival of Amy Beach's 1932 opera *Cabildo* at Grimeborn Festival and Wilton's Music Hall in London. Future plans include a recital of baroque works by Barbara Strozzi, Antonia Bembo and Isabella Leonarda, and *Serenade to Music* with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields.

Anastasia Stahlmann — Orchestra Leader

British violinist Anastasia Stahlmann was born and raised in Buckinghamshire, where she started learning the violin at the age of six.

As a teenager, she was accepted at the Junior Department of Trinity Laban, where she achieved her ATCL recital diploma, and was presented with the Progress Award upon leaving. Subsequently, she studied for her BMus degree with John Crawford and Clare Thompson at Trinity Laban, where she graduated in 2018, achieving First-class Honours. Anastasia completed her Master of Arts degree at Trinity Laban, where she graduated with distinction in July 2020. Her studies were supported, with gratitude, by the Leverhulme Arts Trust, Trinity Laban Award, Dame Susan Morden, and Trinity College London scholarships.

Anastasia is an experienced orchestral player, and has freelanced with orchestras in London and around the UK, including London Sinfonietta, Dorset Opera Festival Orchestra, and London Contemporary Music Festival Orchestra. She is also a Visiting Music Teacher of Violin at Dulwich College, and sings as a soprano in several professional choirs across London.

Anastasia plays on a violin by Ben Conover (2011), kindly funded by the Wolfson Instrument Fund and EMI Music Sound Foundation, using a Vuillaume bow on loan from her mother.

CONCERT SPONSORS

We are grateful to the sponsors who have made this evening's concert possible:

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Nicholas Warren and Catherine Graham-Harrison

Anon



The Way Through the Woods was commissioned by Helen Heenan of the Chiltern Choir, who premiered the work in March 2024.