

PROGRAMME

SONGS & DANCES

the music of

PENELOPE THWAITES

featuring

STEPHEN VARCOE baritone

with

JENNA ROUBOS soprano

COLIN MILNER baritone

Mark Bowler guitar Guy Passey winds Tom Leate violin Sally Wigan piano

PENELOPE THWAITES piano

&

THE MARLBOROUGH SINGERS

Friday 6 May 2016 at 7pm

Schott Recital Room

48 Great Marlborough Street, London W1F 7BB

“Wonderfully catchy tunes and some impressive effects...a compelling aural drama”

Gramophone magazine

“Thwaites is a composer with a gift for hummable tunes and songs that are elegantly wrought”

John Amis critic and broadcaster

PROGRAMME NOTES
SONGS & DANCES
MUSIC OF PENELOPE THWAITES

Missa Brevis 2015

Kyrie Eleison, Gloria, Sanctus, Benedictus, Agnus Dei

The Choir and soloists Jenna Roubos, soprano and Colin Milner, baritone

The *Missa Brevis* was commissioned by the Church of St John the Baptist in Australia's capital Canberra, a city where my parents lived for thirty-three years and where I now have a small home-from-home. St John's has a strong tradition of Anglican church music. It was a privilege to set those ancient Greek and Latin words which have echoed down the ages. I could only set them as I felt them – both in their thrilling rhythms and in their majestic spiritual compass.

All the Days of Christmas Jenna Roubos, soprano

Reverie Colin Milner, baritone

The popular 1980s radio/TV show *My Music* always concluded with each of the four panellists (Frank Muir, Denis Norden, John Amis and Ian Wallace) singing a short song of his choice. John Amis sent me verses by the American poet Phyllis McGinley suggesting I set them for this slot. Subsequently, I wrote for Ian Wallace, the Scottish baritone, what I hoped was a quintessentially "Scottish" tune. He gave it to the poet Carolyn James (also Scottish) who loved it and produced her words, and the title, for it.

Chorale Prelude: Who Would True Valour See Guy Passey, oboe

Offering to write a piece for my brother Peter's wedding to Rosemary Phelps in Portsmouth Cathedral, to incorporate a part for their friend, the violinist Jonathan Sparey, I thought of Bunyan's *Pilgrim Hymn* as the basis for a chorale prelude. It featured again at my own wedding in London to Edward Jackson (this time with Martindale Sidwell at the organ and Brendan O'Brien as soloist). For Edward's memorial service in 2010, his grandson, Guy Passey, now a professional musician, gave the premiere of this version for oboe.

(the next four items will run as a sequence)

Cold Winter's Night The Choir, with Mark Bowler, guitar

In my university days I was beguiled by a recording of Christmas music by a folk group called *The Kingston Trio*. That sound was the inspiration for this carol.

Forestry Stephen Varcoe, baritone

Another early influence, the music of Vaughan Williams is evident here. The setting of my father, Michael Thwaites' poem was written for the American mezzo, Muriel Smith, with whom I worked when first coming to London in the late 60s. Muriel had sung *Carmen* at Covent Garden and was the original *Carmen Jones* on Broadway. Her intensity, even in such a slight song, was memorable. Tonight, in totally different style - and wholly appropriate to the idiom - is the interpretation by my friend and colleague, Stephen Varcoe.

Walkabout Jenna Roubos, soprano, the Choir, with Mark Bowler guitar

Transcending national boundaries, a Swedish friend, poet Gerd Jonzon presented me with verses which absolutely captured the feeling of outback Australia – a country she had come to love. The vast distances, the long-awaited rain on dry land, the laughing kookaburra, the endless beautiful beaches, all conveyed in a few lines. The tune and setting immediately suggested themselves.

Ballad of ‘Old Sox’ Stephen Varcoe, baritone, the Choir, with Mark Bowler guitar

Still very much in Australia, this setting of another of my father’s poems was made last year for his centenary. “Old Sox” was the nickname for Gwynne Sutherland, one of the Australian returned servicemen who, after the second world war, built their shacks on the slopes of Mt Ainslie, in Canberra, eking out an existence. In 1987 Sox was the last of these shack-dwellers to die. Two weeks later his property and all trace of him was burnt to the ground.

A Waltz Sequence Tom Leate, violin, Katherine MacRae, soprano

An arrangement of three of the many tunes written over the years for domestic/family occasions. In turn: 1) for a visit by our friends Donald Swann and John Amis, 2) for my husband’s birthday in 1997 (then played by our daughter Lucy) and 3) for the wedding of his daughter Clare, in 1984.

A very brief pause

Cross Road Alex Clatworthy, soprano, the Choir, with Mark Bowler, guitar

A touch of gospel – a vocal style I enjoy. Alan Thornhill sent me his words in 1973 and they are still strikingly relevant. They immediately suggested this rhythmic treatment.

Psalm 19 Jenna Roubos, Lara Bourdeaux, sopranos, Tom Leate, violin

An Irish musician friend asked me to set these particular verses for her wedding. Who could fail to be inspired by the magnificent language? I particularly wanted to reflect the contrast between the cosmic allusions and the somewhat more down-to-earth advice, which nevertheless remains cheerful.

Psalm 121 The Choir

I was lucky to go to a school (Tintern Girls Grammar) in Melbourne, whose (sometimes intimidating) English headmistress had had the vision to move the school out of central Melbourne to a spacious campus at the foot of the Dandenong ranges – a place where we could sometimes take our books outside and breathe in the bush scents and sounds. Those were the hills of Psalm 121 for us. I was honoured to be asked to write a setting of it, and it has remained the official school psalm. More recently, the school became co-educational, and I have given the boys a section to themselves.

Psalm 23 Jenna Roubos, soprano

A setting for my twin niece (now herself a singer) and her brother for their christening in 1978. Australian soprano Roslyn Dunbar gave the first performance.

from *Ride! Ride!*

The Revd Alan Thornhill, playwright, and former Oxford don, was sent a true story by a Methodist historian, who urged him to turn it into a play. (Martha Thompson's experience can be referenced on google.) The story of the young convert being incarcerated in the London lunatic asylum known as Bedlam, because of her new found beliefs, is all too familiar throughout history. Many of those in the established church of the 18th century, completely out of touch with the ordinary people, would stop at nothing to defend their control. Wesleyan outdoor meetings were often the scene of violence and Wesley himself was thoroughly beaten up on many occasions. Yet as the positive social effects followed the religious revival, Wesley became a widely-loved figure. He rode, they say, over 250,000 miles as he criss-crossed the country preaching – hence the play's title.

The musical was premiered first in Bolton, Lancashire, and subsequently given a professional production in 1976 at London's Westminster Theatre, following an 11-week tour of major cities. Since then it has received more than forty productions world-wide, most recently in Germany (in German) last year. The SOMM CD of all the music, featuring the legendary Australian actor and singer Keith Michell, was issued in 2000 and copies are available this evening. Two of tonight's singers, Maureen Keetch and Stephen Varcoe, sing leading roles on the recording.

.....a sequence

Have You Heard? The Choir

Methodist supporters(including recently converted prize fighter Burgoyne Fish) go head to head with the opposition

The Whole Wide World is my Parish Colin Miner, baritone

Wesley sets out his philosophy that all are equally important

The Garden of England Stephen Varcoe, baritone , Guy Passey, flute

Wesley is interrupted by The Rev Dr Henry Hobart who fights the Establishment corner with some lurid and flowery language. Wesley notices Martha looking on, clearly shivering with the cold. He speaks kindly to her and she is overwhelmed, expressing her reactions in

Why Me? Alex Clatworthy, soprano, Mark Bowler, guitar, Guy Passey, clarinet

from *The Downing Street Cat*

The PM's Rumba Guy Passey saxophone, Mark Bowler, guitar

The musical was written for a girls' boarding school, at which I was teaching. The PM goes to sleep on the roof of No 10 and dreams that the animals, led by the cat, take over the country. The song he sings suggested tonight's instrumental version in rumba style...

A Lambeth Garland

The Lambeth Waltz, The Gardener's Song, Song of a Scotsman, An English Rose, The Wildlife Garden, Reprise
Soloists Jenna Roubos, Monika Bielwicz, sopranos, Christian Forssander tenor, Stephen Varcoe, Colin Milner baritones, Sally Wigan, Penelope Thwaites, piano

In 1987 I was commissioned by the Australian Music Foundation to write the music for a song-cycle on the subject of gardens. Mrs Rosalind Runcie, pianist and wife of the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, undertook the heroic task of renovating the neglected gardens of Lambeth Palace. To this end, she organised a series of fund-raising concerts, one of which included the Brahms Lieberslieder Waltzes – written for vocal quartet and piano duet. My song-cycle was to be a companion piece for this combination. The words were supplied (from the other side of the world) by

my father. The piece was premiered at Lambeth Palace on 28th January 1987, and was performed there subsequently on two occasions. One of these was an outdoor performance at the 1988 Lambeth conference, and at the front of the sea of purple, I shall always remember the joyful vision of Archbishop Desmond Tutu dancing to the music. A later two-piano version of the piece became a regular inclusion in my programmes with pianist John Lavender.

The idea of a garland was suggested by the flowers, but also by the circular nature of the sequence of songs where the opening melody reappears at the end. **The Lambeth Waltz**, expansive and optimistic in mood, is followed by **The Gardener's Song** - a wry, though jaunty look at the challenges any gardener faces. This one whistles while he works. In **Song of a Scotsman** our hero dreams of his native flora being found in the Lambeth garden. This is followed by a song in tribute to the quintessentially **English Rose**. **The Wildlife Garden** refers to Lindy Runcie's idea of a special section for native plants and her (realised) vision of opening the renovated garden to the public. It also alludes to the discovery of Roman remains during the excavation. Finally, we return to the opening **Waltz**, exuberantly building towards its miniature Finale. Long may the Lambeth Garden flourish and give joy!

Notes: Penelope Thwaites

TONIGHT'S ARTISTS

Stephen Varcoe, baritone

is well known as a song recitalist with a particular enthusiasm for the English repertoire. With Hyperion and Chandos he has been involved in many recording projects, one of them being the Chandos *Grainger Edition*. It was while preparing a disc of Grainger's songs with piano that he first met Penelope Thwaites, since when they have frequently worked together. One of the highlights of their collaboration was the brilliant 3-day Grainger Festival in 2011 at King's Place. Much of Stephen's time these days is spent in teaching at the Royal College of Music and in Cambridge, and examining and adjudicating in the UK and abroad. He has contributed a chapter for the *New Percy Grainger Companion*, and other publications include *Sing English Song* and a chapter of *The Cambridge Companion to Singing*. In 2009 he completed a PhD thesis at the University of York on song performance.

Jenna Roubos soprano

Jenna holds a Bachelor of Music Performance from the Victorian College of the Arts. Jenna has been the winner of the National Liederfest of Victoria, the Bendigo Aria Championship Vocal Award, and Vocal Scholar with the Maroondah Singers. She has been several times a semi-finalist in the Herald Sun Aria and the German Opera Grant. Jenna's concert performances include her appearance as a finalist in Opera in the Market with the Australian Opera Scholars under the baton of Benjamin Northey, as soprano soloist in the Bach Cantata 'Lobe Gott in Seinen Reichen' with the VCA orchestra, as well as appearances in productions with the Victorian Opera.

Colin Milner baritone

is an Australian singer, whose teachers included Helen McKinnon at the Sydney Conservatorium and Graham Trew in London. He has performed in several of Penelope Thwaites's works, including the lead role in *Ride! Ride!* for the opening of the Wesley Music Centre in Canberra in 2002 and as a soloist in the world premiere of her *Missa Brevis* in 2015. In March this year, Colin was a soloist at a Commonwealth Day Multi-Faith Celebration in the presence of Their Excellencies the Governor-General of Australia and Lady Cosgrove.

THE MARLBOROUGH SINGERS

Alex Clatworthy trained at the Guildhall School of Music, subsequently appearing on television in *The Hollow Crown* and *Foyle's War* and the West End as Mrs Bucket in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

Katherine MacRae is a Scottish soprano trained at the Royal Academy of Music, and is the proud new mother of a baby girl.

Lara-Clare Bourdeaux A postgraduate of the RWCMD, Lara sings with the BBC National Chorus of Wales, and shortly presents a Shakespeare-themed recital in Oxford for the Iffley Music Society

Monika Bilewicz gained her M. Mus in voice and drama in Poland. She is currently a student of Margaret Humprey Clarke in London, specialising in romantic opera.

Jenna Roubos (see above)

Maureen Keetch RCM, Drury Lane, Glyndebourne, Welsh National, Covent Garden, *Ride! Ride!* Taught at City Lit & Central School, Organist. *SensuousVoice* published 2005.

Fleur Ruda a lawyer, is privileged to be the neighbour of Maureen, and is a keen singer in several choirs.

Sue Smith is a retired clinical microbiologist, sings in the Philharmonia Chorus and Tredici and is Chair of Governors of Westminster secondary school

Christian Forssander sang as a boy under the batons of Benjamin Britten, Norman Del Mar and Leonard Bernstein. As a tenor soloist he performs largely from the sacred repertoire, and also enjoys singing regularly with the Philharmonia Chorus.

Guy Passey (see below)

Stephen Varcoe (see above)

Colin Milner (see above)

INSTRUMENTALISTS

Guy Passey, saxophonist. Member of the award-winning chamber group Kaleidoscope and folk ensemble Tribe of Tinkers; in demand as a multi-instrumentalist in the West End and across the UK.

Mark Bowler studied Music Composition at Coventry University and is now an active performer, composer, and founding member of the folk music collective Tribe of Tinkers.

Sally Wigan made her solo Wigmore Hall debut in 2014 having previously studied at the Liszt Academy in Budapest, the Royal College of Music and Birmingham Conservatoire.

Thomas Leate pursues an exciting and varied freelance career, performing with some of the finest chamber orchestras in the UK and appearing as soloist and chamber-musician all over the world.

PENELOPE THWAITES best known as a concert pianist, has written music all her life.

From an early age she worked with choirs and upon graduating with honours in Music from Melbourne University, she worked as musical director for various shows. She continued to write for this medium for several years before postgraduate piano studies in London with Albert Ferber launched her career as a concert pianist. She has played in over thirty-five countries, and with some of the world's leading orchestras, and has a large recording catalogue. A strand of her work – for which she received the Order of Australia in 2001 – is her promotion of Australian composers, and particularly the music of Percy Grainger. Throughout her career she has continued to write, usually for specific occasions and performers. A number of her works are published by **Bardic Edition** and available from **Schott Music**, including her song cycle **A Lambeth Garland** – commissioned for the Lambeth Palace Garden renovation in 1987. Last year her commissioned **Missa Brevis** was performed at the Church of St John the Baptist in Canberra. Her music has been performed around the world, and here in London's West End (**Ride! Ride!** – subsequently having more than forty productions world-wide), on the BBC (**My Music, In Tune**) at Lambeth Palace, the Wigmore Hall, Southbank, Kings Place, St John's Smith Square, and many other venues.

www.impulse-music.co.uk/thwaites