

Tuesday 8 July 2003, 7.30pm, Holywell Music Room, Oxford

Recital by Charlotte Roberts, soprano, accompanied by Richard Vendome and Catharine Birch, flute, accompanied by Chris Tadman-Robins

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Charlotte Roberts and Catharine Birch have been pupils at Oxford High School with Charlotte holding an academic and Catharine a music scholarship. Both girls finished their A level examinations in the last two weeks.

Charlotte hopes to read English at Cambridge and Catharine, music at Manchester next year. Charlotte has sung with Oxford Girls Choir for the past 8 years. Charlotte performed the role of Belinda in Purcell's Dido and Aeneas and sang Vivaldi's Nulla in Mundo Pax Sincera at the Pieta in Venice on the choir's summer tour last year. She is currently head girl of the choir. Catharine is a member of the junior Royal Academy of Music and will be competing in the BBC Young Musician of the Year competition this year. The girls have each achieved the Associated Board grade 8 with distinction and Catharine also has Grade 8 piano. Both girls are currently preparing for the Associated Board Diploma examination.

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#### Programme

Charlotte Roberts, soprano

Hark! The Echoing Air - Henry Purcell

Domine Deus - Antonio Vivaldi

Nulla in mundo pax sincera - Antonio Vivaldi

Blute nur, du liebes Herz - Johann Sebastian Bach

Oh! had I Jubal's lyre - George Frideric Handel

Batti, batti, o bel Masetto - Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Catharine Birch, flute

Sonata - Paul Hindemith

Fantasie Op 79 - Gabriel Fauré

Charlotte Roberts, soprano

Meine Liebe ist grün - Johannes Brahms

Après un Rêve - Gabriel Fauré

Wer hat dies Liedlein erdacht? - Gustav Mahler

O mio babbino caro - Giacomo Puccini

Sleep - Ivor Gurney

Corpus Christi Carol - Benjamin Britten

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## Programme notes

Hark! The Echoing Air Henry Purcell (1659-1695)  
from *The Fairy Queen* (1692), Z 629

Hark! the echoing air a triumph sings,  
And all around pleas'd Cupids clap their wings. (words by E. Settle)

Henry Purcell died aged 36, but his rapid development means that he is considered by many to be the greatest English composer. At just 18 he was appointed a composer to the royal band and at 20 he became the organist of Westminster Abbey, succeeding his teacher John Blow. It was not until 1680 that he began composing music for London theatres, although he eventually composed music for over fifty dramatic works. *The Fairy Queen* (1692) is one of Purcell's 5 semi-operas, extended entertainments of mainly spoken drama but with substantial musical sections. *The Fairy Queen* (based on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), for example, ends each of its five acts with a collection of songs and choruses, with some dances – the music acting as means of resolving the dramatic tensions. This air, from Act V is a solo for Second Woman and a following chorus. The joyful coloratura reflects the triumphant words and the resolved dramatic situation at the end of the opera, with all couples happily united. The onomatopœic style, notably with the percussive quavers on the word "clap" during the second section, also creates a sense of rejoicing.

Domine Deus Antonio Vivaldi (1669-1741) from *Gloria in D*, RV 589

Domine Deus Rex coelestis Deus Pater omnipotens  
Lord God, Heavenly king, God the Father Almighty. (Trans. Richard Walters)

The dates of Vivaldi's two *Glorias* are uncertain, although both are thought to be later than 1708. much of Vivaldi's sacred vocal music was written for the Coro of the Pio Ospedale della Pietà, a school for orphaned and destitute girls in Venice where Vivaldi taught the violin, during periods when no choir master available such as 1713-1717 and 1737-1739. However, it must be remembered that Vivaldi also received commissions for vocal works from other sources. *Domine Deus* is essentially a simple, lyrical solo, which reflects the simple truth presented in the words. The quaver pattern in the walking bass and the use of solo oboe echoing or playing in thirds with the voice adds to this feeling of sustained mood. However, the listener's interest is held by the contrast between areas of sustained harmony and phrases with substantial harmonic movement – especially when combined with extended vocal melisma (groups of notes sung to the same sound).

Nulla in mundo pax sincera Antonio Vivaldi (1669-1741)  
motet – 1st movement, RV 630 translated by Charlotte Roberts

Nulla in mundo pax sincera sine felle, pura et vera, dulcis Jesu, est in te. Inter poenas et tormenta Vivit anima contenta Casti amoris sola spe.

There is no true peace in the world without poison, but what, pure and true, sweet Jesus, is in you. Among punishments and torments Lives a happy soul Blameless love its only hope.

In 18th Century Italy, a motet was defined as a sacred, vocal work with a non-liturgical, Latin verse. Almost all were scored, as is this one, for voice with 2 violins, viola and "Basso" (continuo instruments such as the lower strings and a keyboard instrument – usually organ in Vivaldi's case). Their non-liturgical nature meant that church authorities often tried to limit the use of motets in services, although they were widely used during times of relative silence, such as the Offertory, Elevation and Blessing in the Mass. Generally intended as show pieces for a particular singer, motets had a rapid turnover, with the choirmaster at the Pieta expected to compose at least 2 each month. Nevertheless, just 12 of Vivaldi's motets survive (RV 623- 634). This da capo aria, the first in the motet, is followed by a recitative and aria warning of the temptations of the world. The motet finishes with a traditional, highly florid, Alleluia. The change to the minor key in the middle section reflects not only standard practice with da capo arias, but also the change of mood in the words, shifting focus from the peace provided by Jesus to the world's torments. Charlotte Roberts sang this piece in the Ospedale della Pieta last September during a visit to Venice of the Oxford Girls Choir

Blute nur, du liebes Herz Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)  
from the St. Matthew Passion, BWV 244

Blute nur, du liebes Herz! Ach! ein Kind, das du erzogen, das an deiner Brust  
gesogen, droht den Pfleger zu emorden, denn es ist zur Schlange worden. (words by  
"Picander" pseudonym for Christian Friedrich Henrici (1700-1764))

Only bleed, you beloved heart! Oh, a child that you brought up, that nursed at your  
breast, threatens to murder the guardian for (the child) has become the serpent. (Trans.  
Richard Walters)

The St. Matthew Passion was first performed at Thomaskirche, Leipzig, either on April 11th 1727 or April 5th 1729. The 2nd of Bach's three Passions, written to be performed on Good Friday in the church of St. Thomas' school where he had been Kantor since May 1723. Passions (musical settings of the Passion story as related in one of the gospels) traditionally involved a narrator (the 'Evangelist') and singers to take on the roles of figures like Christ and Pilate, with the chorus taking on various crowd roles. Bach also included chorales sung by the congregation and reflective arias, of which *Blute nur* is an example, which comment on the religious message. These, naturally, tended to be specially written, although the words of the Evangelist were often adapted from the biblical text. *Blute nur* (part 1 no.12 in the St. Matthew Passion) is a lament for the mother of Judas Iscariot following the announcement of his intent to betray Jesus – an unusual choice of emphasis. However, it allows Bach to create some wonderfully intense, involved music, with many disjunct phrases (phrases that contain large intervals) and frequent chromaticisms emphasising the discomfort implied in the words. The middle section of the da capo aria marks an increase in intensity with a much more varied text and a faster moving vocal part, which is here, unlike in the first part of the aria, doubled by the orchestra. The unpredictable coloratura phrases on the words "emorden" (murder) and "Schlange" (serpent) emphasise their emotive quality, with the final "Schlange" especially reflecting the twisting of a snake and by implication the trickery of Judas.

Oh! had I Jubal's lyre George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)  
from Joshua, HG 17

Oh! had I Jubal's lyre, or Miriam's tuneful voice to sounds like his I would aspire, in  
songs like hers rejoice, My humble strains but faintly show how much to heaven and  
thee I owe. (words by Thomas Morell)

Although born in the Saxony town of Halle, from 1712 Handel lived in London, and had a major impact on English music of the time, composing *Rinaldo* in 1711, the first Italian opera written specially for London, which introduced the musical styles of Italy to England's backward musical scene. However, since operas could not be performed during Lent, Handel – always willing to adapt in order to make the greatest possible profit – founded an oratorio season in London during Lent 1735, playing organ concertos in the intermission. In all, Handel wrote over 30 oratorios, of which *Joshua* is one of 5 written between 1746 and 1748 often called military or victory oratorios since they deal with the Old Testament battles of the Jewish people, in this case Joshua's conquest of Canaan. These oratorios were prompted by work with a new librettist, Thomas Morrel, as well as reflecting on the confidence and splendour of the Georgian age. Composed in 1747 and first performed the following year at the Theatre Royal at Covent Garden, in many ways it is similar to the earlier *Judas Maccabaeus* and it is entirely possible that Handel was aiming to cash in following the earlier oratorio's huge success. Achsah's aria from the 3rd Act is typically light-hearted, especially in its ironic use of music and text, the flashy coloratura clearly belying the modesty of the words. The spirited crescendos, frequent accents and focus on the word "rejoice" (used in melisma 4 times) clearly reflect the triumphant nature of Handel's later oratorios, although Handel composed the original melody in his teens and it was first used in *Psalm Laudate Pueri* in 1702.

Batti, batti, o bel Masetto Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)  
Zerlina's aria from *Don Giovanni* (Il dissoluto punito)

Batti, batti, o bel Masetto, La tua povera Zerlina; Staro qui come agnellina Le tue botte ad aspettar. Lasciero straziarmi il crine, Lasciero cavarmi gli occhi, E le care tue manine Lieta poi sapro baciare. Ah, lo vedo, non hai core! Pace, pace, o vita mia, In contenti ed allegria Notte e di vogliam passar, Si, notte e di vogliam passar. (words by Lorenzo da Ponte)

Beat me, beat me, my Masetto. Beat your poor Zerlina. I'll stay here like a lamb And await your every blow. I'll let you pull my hair out, I'll let you gouge my eyes out, And then happily I will kiss Your wonderfully sweet hands. Ah, I see you have no heart! Let's make up, my own true love. In happiness and joy We must pass the days and nights, Yes, each day and every night. (Trans. William Murray, Capitol Records Inc.)

Mozart made his first public appearance as a harpsichord soloist at just 5 years old. His introduction to opera was similar. He was taken by his father Leopold to Italy in 1770, where he wrote his first opera for production in Milan when he was just 14. However, it is for his later operas, notably the three Da Ponte operas *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan Tutte*, that he is most well-known. *Don Giovanni* was composed by Mozart in 1787 following the success of the earlier *The Marriage of*

Figaro and first performed in October of the same year at the National Theatre, Prague. This aria is sung by Zerlina, a peasant girl about to marry Masetto and one of Don Giovanni's attempted conquests (it is interesting that such a famous libertine should fail in all five of his attempts to seduce women during the opera), towards the end of Act I. Both Batti, batti and Zerlina's second aria Vedrai, carino are attempts to soothe and comfort her fiancé, indeed, one of the most appealing aspects of Mozart's opera is the extent to which women remain in control of the male characters, despite Don Giovanni's philandering. The opening 2/4 section of the aria is so carefully crafted as an emotional outpouring, with semiquaver rests placed in the middle of words acting like very carefully controlled and rhythmic sobs and impassioned, isolated two-bar outpourings of "batti, batti" (beat me, beat me), that many critics have seen Zerlina as a skilled manipulator of men rather than an innocent victim. The second section of the aria is, by contrast, very simple, based largely on just one motif. The 6/8 rhythm reminds the listener of Zerlina and Masetto's peasant dance performed earlier in the opera and it is possible that Zerlina seeks to soothe Masetto by reminding him of more innocent times.

#### Sonata Paul Hindemith (1895-1963)

With Schoenberg, Stravinsky and Bartok, Hindemith has been described as one of the four innovators of musical modernism. He conducted much theoretical study into harmony systems which, from the 1930s, demonstrated itself in his works. This work comes from a remarkable series of sonatas, composed during the 1930s for every major instrument, almost all of which have become a part of standard repertory.

#### Fantasia Op 79 Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Recognition came slowly during Fauré's lifetime, largely owing to the modernity of his music. The Fantasia is one of only a handful of miniatures he composed for one instrument and piano, the majority of his works being vocal.

#### Meine Liebe ist grün Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) from Junge Lieder I , Op. 63 No. 5

Meine Liebe ist grün wie der Fliederbusch, und mein Lieb ist schon wie die Sonne die glänzt wohl herauf der Fliederbusch und füllt mit Duft und mit Wonne, Meine Seele hat Schwingen der Nachtigall und wiegt sich in blühendem Flieder, und jauchzet und singet vom Duft berauscht viel liebestrunkene Lieder.

In this song the singer compares love with a flowering bush and the sun that shines down on it, filling it with perfumes, the singer whose soul has the wings of a nightingale cradled in the bush, and sings and rejoices with love-intoxicated songs. This song, written in 1873, is one of 196 songs written by Brahms during the course of his life, and marks a turning point in his work. During the earlier part of Brahms' life, the composer tended to write either songs with repeated stanzas or variation songs (where stanzas were all based on the same tune). Between 1864 and 1873, Brahms had concentrated on durchkomponiert (songs made up of stanzas with changing tunes) but from 1873 returned to songs with repeated stanzas, of which this is an example. Brahms believed that for solo vocal pieces "the ideal is the folksong", and there are several folk influences in this piece, such as the lack of any introduction

and the largely diatonic (based on the notes of the scale) harmony. Brahms' collaboration with Felix Schumann (the librettist for *Junge Lieder*), son of Robert and Clara Schumann, reflects his close friendship with the family and particularly his adoration for Clara, which grew following Schumann's attempted suicide and breakdown, during which time Brahms moved to Dusseldorf to be nearer to her. In this song the energy of the piano part is unrelenting, almost angry, yet the voice soars above it in a simple, two verse melody which reflects the optimistic, light-hearted text. The title "Young songs" seems particularly apt when applied to the songs sense of urgency, with Romantic crescendos and a *stringendo* (speeding up) section for piano and the close of each verse.

Après un Rêve Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) op. 7 no. 1  
Dedicated to Madame Marguerite Baugnies

Dans un sommeil que charmait ton image Je rêvais le bonheur ardent mirage, Tes yeux étaient plus doux, ta voix pure et sonore, Tu rayonnais comme un ciel éclairé par l'aurore; Tu m'appelais et je quittais la terre Pour m'enfuir avec toi vers la lumière, Les cieux pour nous entr'ouvraient leurs nues, Splendeurs inconnues, lueurs divines entrevues. Hélas! Hélas, triste réveil des songes, Je t'appelle, ô nuit, rends-moi tes mensonges; Reviens, reviens radieuse, Reviens, ô nuit mystérieuse! (words by Romain Bussine)

In a sleep charmed by your image I dreamed of happiness, passionate delusion: Your eyes were softer, your voice pure and full, You were radiant as a sky lit by the dawn. You called me and I left the earth To escape with you towards the light; For us the skies parted their clouds; Unknown splendours, divine glowings half seen... Alas! Alas, sad waking from dreams! I beg you, O night, to give me back your illusions; Come back, come back in your radiance; Come back, O mysterious night! (Trans. James Day)

Although Fauré trained, from the age of nine, at Niedermeyer's school in Paris (a school dedicated to the teaching of traditional church music composition, piano and organ playing) it is for his secular songs that Fauré is best known. During his life he composed six song cycles and published three collections of 20 songs, although the time available to him for composition was limited by his position as organist at several Paris churches and his need to give piano lessons to supplement his income. The text of *Après un Rêve* was originally an anonymous Italian poem "Levati sol que la luna e levata", adapted and translated by Faure's friend Racine. It is not surprising, therefore, that many critics feel the song is based on an Italian style, although the main influences on Faure's song-writing came from his two teachers, Niedermeyer and Saint-Saens. Between 1872 and 1877 Fauré developed a considerable intimacy with the Viardot family, becoming engaged to Marianne Viardot in 1877. She, however, broke the engagement off at the end of the year, and *Après un Rêve* is part of a collection of sombre, minor key songs composed the following year. The themes of loss and delusion that pervade this song in particular make it especially poignant when related to the loss in Fauré's personal life. *Après un Rêve* is an excellent example of the importance Fauré attached to the relationship between words and music in his later songs. The song contains a balance of extroverted appeals, the climax (containing the song's highest pitch and the highest volume) on the word "Hélas!" (alas) is especially striking, and introverted mysticism, such as the

"mystérieuse" (mysterious) that finishes the piece with the song's lowest pitch and volume.

Wer hat dies Liedlein erdacht? Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)  
from Des Knaben Wunderhorn no.4

Dort oben am Berg In dem hohen Haus! In dem haus! Da gukket ein fein's lieb's  
Mädel heraus! Es ist nicht dort daheime! Es ist des Wirts sein Tochterlein! Es wohnt  
auf grüner Heide! Meine Herzle ist wund! Komm, Schätzle, mach's g'sund!

Dein' schwarzbraune Auglein, Die hab'n mich verwund't Dien rosiger mund macht  
Herzengesund. Macht Jugend verständig Macht Tote lebendig, Macht kranke gesund,  
Ja gesund. Wer hat denn das schon schone Liedlien erdacht? Es haben's drei Gäns'  
ubers Wasser gebracht. Zwei graue und eine weisse! Und wer das liedlein nicht  
singen kann, Dem woollen sie es pfeifen! Ja! (words by Brentano and Arnim)

Up there on the mountain In the high house! In the house! There looks out a fine dear  
little maiden! She is not at home there! She is the innkeeper's little daughter! She lives  
on a green heath! My heart is sore! Come, sweetheart, make it well!

Your dark brown eyes Have wounded me Your rosy mouth makes my heart hale.  
Makes the young wise Makes the dead come alive, Makes the sick recover, recover  
indeed. Who then has thought up this fine, fine little song? Three geese brought it  
over the water. Two gray and a white! And whoever can't sing this little song, They  
will whistle it for me! Indeed! (Trans. Edith Braun)

It may seem incongruous that Mahler, famous for his complex, ironic and mature symphonies should have concerned himself with an idiosyncratic collection of texts in the folk tradition by Brentano and Arnim. Nevertheless, having come across Des Knaben Wunderhorn ("The boy's magic horn") through his connection with the Weber family, Mahler used these texts for all but one of his songs during the period 1887 to 1901, even incorporating some into his Second, Third and Fourth Symphonies. Indeed, some critics, notably Paul Griffiths, have argued that the naivety of the texts allowed Mahler to display his own ironic approach, and it is certainly true that the excessively long melisma at the end of the first and third verses and the "oom pa pa" 3/8 rhythm gently mock the traditional German folk style. Despite working as the conductor at the Stadttheater in Hamburg between 1891 and 1897, Mahler composed this song on the 6th of February 1892 and orchestrated it within 10 weeks (the original arrangement was for orchestra and piano). It was first performed in Hamburg in October 1893. Although Des Knaben Wunderhorn is essentially light-hearted, this is not typical of his work. In general his songs reflect his preoccupation with death and sorrow, as can be seen from his earlier Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen ("Songs of a Wayfarer" 1885) written after an unhappy love affair, or his later Kindertotenlieder ("Songs for the death of children" 1904).

O mio babbino caro Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)

Lauretta's aria from Gianni Schicchi

O mio babbino caro, mi piace, è bello bello; vo'andare in Porta Rossa a comperar l'anello! Sì, sì, ci voglio andare! E se l'amassi indarno, Andrei sul Ponte Vecchio, Ma per buttarmi in Arno! Mi struggo e mi tormento! O Dio, vorrei morir!... Babbo, pietà, pietà! Babbo, pietà, pietà!... (words by G. Forzano)

Oh, dear daddy, I like him, he's handsome, handsome; I want to go to Porta Rossa to buy the ring! Yes, yes, I want to go there! And if it's useless to love him, I'll go to the Ponte Vecchio and throw myself into the Arno! I am pining, I am tortured! O God, I could die!... Daddy, have pity, have pity! Daddy, have pity, have pity!... (Trans. DECCA)

Puccini, born in Italy, was a fifth generation composer of the Puccini family, although he was the first to be directly concerned with the theatre rather than the church. Having studied at the Milan conservatory, he wrote his first opera (*Le villi*) in 1884, and went on to write 10 other operas in his 40 year career. His operas reflect several new innovations, one of the most important being the concept of verismo opera, to which the composer was introduced through his junior, Pietro Mascagni. These operas reacted against the melodrama of Verdi and the loftiness of Wagner, concentrating instead on the darker aspects of contemporary life. Although Puccini is generally not included among the number of verismo composers (he often set his operas historically and chose exotic locations) the style is reflected in the intense emotional content of his operatic work. This emotional quality has ensured his huge popularity to this day, although contemporary composers and critics often viewed him as a crowd- pleaser, noting especially his ability to tailor arias to fit the four-minute gramophone record. Gianni Schicchi is the third of Puccini's triptych operas (a set of three, one-act operas intended to be performed in one evening) and his only comedy. First performed at the Metropolitan, New York on the 14th of December 1918 with *Il Tabaro* and *Suor Angelica*, the opera is set in 1299 in Florence and is a light-hearted exploration of the traditional comic plot of legacy hunting. Lauretta's aria has become famous out of context, but is in fact a rather tongue-in- cheek plea for her father to study a will in order to appease her future mother-in-law, which she hopes will encourage her to allow the wedding to go ahead. The aria is built up on a phrase from Rinuccio (her lover's) previous aria, but its very simplicity adds to its beauty. Puccini often uses very simple melodies for the most emotive of his heroines' arias (*Visi d'arte* from *Tosca* is a notable example) and while the dramatic octave leaps and the gentle, arpeggio- based accompaniment may be ironic in context, they are sincere enough to create a real sense of pathos in concert.

Sleep Ivor Gurney (1890-1937)

fFrom *Five Elizabethan Songs*, dedicated to Emmy Hunt

Come, Sleep, and with thy sweet deceiving  
Lock me in delight awhile; Let some  
pleasing dream beguile All my fancies;  
that from thence I may feel an influence  
All my powers of care bereaving!  
Though but a shadow, but a sliding,  
Let me know some little joy!  
We that suffer long annoy  
Are contented with a thought  
Through an idle fancy wrought:  
O let my joys have some abiding  
O let my joys have some abiding.  
(words by John Fletcher)

Born in Gloucester in 1890, Gurney started composing at 13 and in 1911 gained a composition scholarship to the Royal College of Music. He served as a private during



the First World War and was wounded and gassed in 1917. His experiences in the trenches prompted him to write several collections of poems, including *Severn and Somme* in 1917, which are well regarded. No doubt his enthusiasm for poetry allowed him to appreciate the poets whose work he set to music and the connection between words and music in his songs. Tragically, in 1922 the manic depressive illness that had plagued him since early adulthood, heightened by his experiences during active service, led to his family declaring him insane and he spent the last 15 years of his life in an institution, dying aged only 47 in the City of London Mental Hospital. During his life Gurney wrote over 300 songs, of which the Five Elizabethan Songs (affectionately named "The Elizas" by Gurney) are some of the earliest, composed in 1913 when he was just 23. They include settings of poems by Shakespeare and Nashe as well as John Fletcher (1579-1625) whose "Sleep" is taken from *The Woman Hater* (1607). Gurney obviously appreciated the beauty of the poetry, since he wrote in a letter to his friend F. W. Harvey "blister my kidneys, bisurate my magnesia if the music is not as English, as joyful, as tender as any lyric of all that noble host..." and indeed the music beautifully reflects the contradictions within the poem, with the soporific, steady, semiquaver accompaniment lulling the listener, until a sudden chromaticism disturbs the gentle mood, very like the speaker – lulled to sleep only to be forced to reawaken.

Corpus Christi Carol Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

From "A Boy was Born", Dedicated to John Hahessy He bare him up, he bare him down, He bare him into an orchard brown. Lully, lullay, lully, lullay, The falcon hath born my make away. In that orchard there was an hall That was hanged with purple and pall. And in that hall there was a bed, It was hanged with gold so red. In that bed there lieth a knight His woundes bleeding, day and night. By that bedside kneeleth a may, And she weepeth both night and day. And by that bedside there standeth a stone, Corpus Christi written thereon. (15th century anon.)

Born in Lowestoft in 1913, Britten started composing at the age of five, and began his formal teaching under the composer Frank Bridge when he was just eleven. In 1930 he began his studies in piano and composition at the Royal College of Music, although he afterwards said he "learnt little", largely because the Director of the College, Hugh Allen, was an associate of Vaughan Williams who disliked the virtuosity of Bridge's style. During the war, Britten was a conscientious objector, expressing an attitude to conflict reflected in his *War Requiem*. Despite prevalent 20th century trends, Britten's work often has a definite tonality, a fact which led to his work being easily accessible for amateurs and children, with whom he worked on a regular basis. The *Corpus Christi Carol* was originally arranged by Britten for mixed voice choir in his early choral work "A Boy was Born" (1933) although he later arranged it as a solo for the boy alto John Hahessy, a chorister at Westminster Cathedral, to whom the work is dedicated. The 15th Century text is traditional and has been arranged by many composers, especially in its 19th century format as the more overtly religious "Down in Yon Forest". More significantly, the tune is also originally medieval and was adapted by Britten. The simple repetitive verse structure and the way almost the whole song is based on a descending D major scale creates a continuity of mood that matches the mysticism of the text, while the 6/8 voice part set against the 4/4 piano creates a sense of fluid rhythm in which a strict beat does not intrude upon the listeners sense of suspended animation.

Programme notes by Charlotte Roberts and Catharine Birch