

WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 31 October 2023
7.30pm

A Prayer for Deliverance

Tenebrae

Nigel Short conductor

Rachel Haworth soprano
Victoria Meteyard soprano
Áine Smith soprano
Katie Trethewey soprano
Emma Walshe soprano
Rosanna Wicks soprano
Hannah Cooke alto

Martha McLorinan alto
Eleanor Minney alto
Anna Semple alto
Jeremy Budd tenor
Jack Granby tenor
Nicholas Madden tenor

Tom Robson tenor
Ben Davies bass
Joseph Edwards bass
Jimmy Holliday bass
Tom Lowen bass
Simon Whiteley bass

Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

The Evening-Watch Op. 43 No. 1 (1924)

Cecilia McDowall (b.1951)

Standing as I do before God (2013)

Francis Pott (b.1957)

The Souls of the Righteous (2000)

Caroline Shaw (b.1982)

and the swallow (2017)

Richard Rodney Bennett (1936-2012)

A Good-Night (1999)

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

Rest (1902)

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John Tavener (1944-2013)

Song for Athene (1993)

Ralph Vaughan Williams

Valiant for Truth (1940)

Robert Lucas Pearsall (1795-1856)

Lay a garland on her hearse (1840)

Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900)

The long day closes (1868)

Herbert Howells (1892-1983)

Requiem (1932)

William H Harris (1883-1973)

Bring us, O Lord God (1959)



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Tonight's programme is centred around themes of rest. With music spanning the 19th Century to the present day, it culminates in the moving *Requiem* by Herbert Howells. Much of the music we'll hear deals with death, or with sleep - ever its fertile metaphor. But among these perennial themes are responses to recent events too.

Several works draw on the literature of the Tudor and Stuart periods - a time of fervent religious belief and social upheaval, encompassing reformation of the church and civil war. Amidst such strife, many people literally thought the world would soon end, with Christ's second coming. In contemporary writings death was sometimes described with a quiet confidence in God's plan, or even a sense of triumph.

Henry Vaughan's poem *The Evening-Watch* is a short dialogue between the body and soul, in which the former wishes for sleep, and the latter looks to the afterlife. It evidently appealed to the austere sensibilities of **Gustav Holst**, who pitted the body's solo voice against the soul's richly ambiguous chords, made from stacked intervals of fourths. Meanwhile, his friend **Ralph Vaughan Williams** was repeatedly drawn to John Bunyan's allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*, eventually turning it into an opera. *Valiant for Truth* is a setting of a moment when the eponymous pilgrim crosses the river of death and is received into the 'Celestial City'. As God's trumpets welcome him, the choir imitates a striking fanfare. And a contemporary of both composers, Anglican organist **William Henry Harris**, closes tonight's programme. His late setting of John Donne's poem *Bring us, O Lord God* has a sonorous grandeur - learned no doubt from a lifetime's immersion in church music - that suitably reflects Donne's vision of the glories of heaven.

Other pieces take on a memorial role for a particular individual. **Richard Rodney Bennett's** gently musing *A Good-Night* was composed as part of a collaborative 'Garland' in memory of Linda McCartney, who he personally knew. **John Tavener's** *Song for Athene* was written after his friend Athene Hariades was killed in a cycling accident, and was brought to worldwide attention by its performance at the funeral of Princess Diana in 1997. Combining words from the Orthodox liturgy and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, its sustained drone and slowly wafting phrases create a sense of mystery with mesmerising sonority. But for some composers, the connection to the memorialised is less direct. In *Standing as I do before God*, **Cecilia McDowall** pays tribute to Edith Cavell - the nurse executed during the First World War after helping Allied soldiers to escape German occupation - whose moving final words are combined with poetic reflections by Seán Street, in music of luminous, probing meditation. **Francis Pott's** *The Souls of the Righteous* was commissioned in memory of Sheila Bushnell, a long-standing member of the congregation at Winchester Cathedral. Although Pott never met her, he was prompted by memories of

his parents while composing the piece, and the music's elaborate part-writing harks back to William Byrd, who set the same text in Latin as *Justorum Animae*.

The Victorian age is often thought of as somewhat obsessed with death - a time of grand public memorials and ritualised mourning. Something of its dignified ideal can be heard in **Robert Pearsall's** *Lay a garland on her hearse*, which adapts words from the Jacobean play *The Maid's Tragedy*, and steadily unfolds with expressive suspensions. Alternatively, *The long day closes* by **Arthur Sullivan** takes on the resonant theme of sleep, with words by Henry Fothergill Chorley. Its scoring for male voices lends it a melancholy hue, while rich harmonies suggest strong passions underneath its controlled framework. The language turns even more deathly in *Rest* by Christina Rossetti, a mysterious poem evoking a woman in repose. In Vaughan Williams's beautiful setting, there is a hush in the central section for 'even her very heart has ceased to stir'.

Back in the land of the living, two composers have responded to modern events through the ancient texts of the Psalms. **Caroline Shaw's** setting of Psalm 84, *and the swallow*, was written during the Syrian refugee crisis and reflects a longing for home. The haunting directness of its chordal opening and the lush textures that follow have made it a modern favourite, with multiple instrumental arrangements already in existence (listen out, too, for the subtle imitation of rain at the very end). Even more recent is **Joel Thompson's** intense and virtuosic *A Prayer for Deliverance*, which takes words from Psalm 13. A wide-ranging piece in every sense, its SATB scoring is augmented with eight solo parts. Thompson composed it during the pandemic, and his aim was to combine honesty about the turmoil of the time with a sentiment of hope.

Finally, **Herbert Howells's** *Requiem* is the longest work on tonight's programme, though it is slight by the standards of the genre. Its six short sections draw on the Latin Mass, the Book of Common Prayer, and Psalms - a format seemingly modelled on a similar *Requiem* by Howells's former teacher, Walford Davies. After the tragic death of the composer's son Michael in 1935, parts of the piece were then reworked into the much larger *Hymnus Paradisi* for soloists, chorus and orchestra, but the *Requiem* itself wasn't published until 1980. It's a testament to the expressive power of the music that for a time it was assumed it was also composed after Michael's death, whereas it's now known that it was written before that painful loss, in 1932. Of course, having lived through the First World War, Howells's generation were no strangers to grief. And it is arguable that the contemplative intimacy of this work makes it all the more touching - that much more suggestive of an immensity which cannot be expressed.

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Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

The Evening-Watch Op. 43 No. 1 (1924)

Henry Vaughan

The body: Farewell! I go to sleep; but, when
The day star springs, I'll wake again.

The soul: Go, sleep in peace; and when thou liest
Unnumbered in thy dust, when all this frame
Is but one dram, and what thou now descriest
In sev'ral parts shall want a name,
Then may his peace be with thee, and each dust
Writ in his book, who ne'er betray'd man's trust!

The body: Amen! but hark, ere we two stray,
How many hours dost think till day?

The soul: Ah! go; thou'rt weak and sleepy. Heav'n
Is a plain watch, and without figures winds
All ages up; who drew this circle even
He fills it; days and hours are blinds.
Yet, this take with thee; the last gasp of time
Is thy first breath, and man's eternal Prime.

Cecilia McDowall (b.1951)

Standing as I do before God (2013)

Edith Cavell and Seán Street

I have seen death so often that it is not strange or fearful to
me.

Standing as I do in view of God and eternity, I realize
patriotism is not enough;

I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone.

And when the time was close,
For once her eyes filled with tears,
Then she quietly rose,
Walked silently through the stilled prison,
The grey dawn-light,
Passed gas flame, tired flowers,
Out beyond her final night,
A flame alight in hours before infinity,
In the presence of death
Leaving all enmity:
In view of God we are air after breath.

Francis Pott (b.1957)

The Souls of the Righteous (2000)

Liturgical text

The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God and there
shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise
they seemed to die: and their departure is taken for
misery, and their going from us to be utter destruction:
but they are in peace. Amen.

Caroline Shaw (b.1982)

and the swallow (2017)

Liturgical text

How beloved is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts,
My soul yearns, faints, my heart and my flesh cry.
The sparrow found a house and the swallow, her nest,
Where she may raise her young.
They pass through the valley of bakka,
They make it a place of springs.
The autumn rains also cover it with pools.

Richard Rodney Bennett (1936-2012)

A Good-Night (1999)

Francis Quarles

Close now thine eyes and rest secure;
Thy soul is safe enough, thy body sure;
He that loves thee, he that keeps
And guards thee, never slumbers, never sleeps.
The smiling conscience in a sleeping breast
Has only peace, has only rest;
The music and the mirth of kings
Are all but very discords, when she sings;
Then close thine eyes and rest secure;
No sleep so sweet as thine, no rest so sure.

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

Rest (1902)

Christina Rossetti

O Earth lie heavily upon her eyes;
Seal her sweet eyes weary of watching, Earth.
Lie close around her,
Leave no room for mirth with its harsh laughter,
Nor for sound of sighs.
She hath no questions, she hath no replies,
Hushed in and curtained with a blessed dearth
Of all that irked her from her hour of birth;
With stillness that is almost Paradise.
Darkness more clear than noon-day holdeth her,
Silence more musical than any song;
Even her very heart hath ceased to stir;
Until the morning of Eternity her rest shall not begin nor
end,
But be, and when she wakes she will not think it long.

*Please do not turn the page until the song and its accompaniment
have ended.*

Joel Thompson (b.1988)

A Prayer for Deliverance (2021)

Liturgical text

O God, my God! How long?
Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
And hold sorrow in my heart day after day?
Look at me and answer me!
Give light to my eyes, O God,
Or I will sleep the sleep of death.
But I trust in your unfailing love.
May my heart rejoice in your salvation!
I will sing praises, O God, when You deliver me...
Amen.

Interval

John Tavener (1944-2013)

Song for Athene (1993)

William Shakespeare

Liturgical text

Alleluia.
May flights of angels sing thee to thy rest. Alleluia.
Remember me, O Lord, when you come into your kingdom.
Alleluia.
Give rest, O Lord, to your handmaid who has fallen asleep.
Alleluia.
The choir of saints have found the well-spring of life and
door of paradise. Alleluia.
Life: a shadow and a dream. Alleluia.
Weeping at the grave creates the song: Alleluia.
Come, enjoy rewards and crowns I have prepared for you.
Alleluia.

Ralph Vaughan Williams

Valiant for Truth (1940)

John Bunyan

After this it was noised abroad that Mr Valiant-for-Truth was taken with a summons ...; and had this for a token that the summons was true, 'That his pitcher was broken at the fountain.' When he understood it, he called for his friends, and told them of it. Then, said he, 'I am going to my Father's, and though with great difficulty I am got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the trouble I have been at to arrive where I am. My sword, I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill, to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me, that I have fought his battles, who now will be my rewarder.' When the day that he must go hence, was come, many accompanied him to the riverside, into which, as he went, he said, 'Death,

where is thy sting?' And as he went down deeper, he said, 'Grave, where is thy victory?'

So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.

Robert Lucas Pearsall (1795-1856)

Lay a garland on her hearse (1840)

Francis Beaumont

Lay a garland on her hearse
Of dismal yew.
Maidens, willow branches wear,
Say she died true.
Her love was false, but she was firm.
Upon her buried body lie
Lightly, thou gentle earth.

Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900)

The long day closes (1868)

Henry Fothergill Chorley

No star is o'er the lake,
Its pale watch keeping,
The moon is half awake,
Through gray mist creeping.
The last red leaves fall round
The porch of roses,
The clock hath ceased to sound,
The long day closes.

Sit by the silent hearth
In calm endeavour,
To count the sound of mirth,
Now dumb for ever.
Heed not how hope believes
And fate disposes:
Shadow is round the eaves,
The long day closes.

The lighted windows dim
Are fading slowly.
The fire that was so trim
Now quivers lowly.
Go to the dreamless bed
Where grief reposes,
Thy book of toil is read,
The long day closes.

Herbert Howells (1892-1983)

Requiem (1932)

Liturgical text

O saviour of the world, who by thy cross and thy precious blood has redeemed us, save us and help us, we humbly beseech thee, O Lord.

The Lord is my shepherd: therefore can I lack nothing. He shall feed me in a green pasture: and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort.

He shall convert my soul: and bring me forth in the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: thy rod and thy staff comfort me.

Thou shalt prepare a table before me against them that trouble me: thou hast anointed my head with oil, and my cup shall be full.

But thy loving-kindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Requiem aeternam dona eis. Rest eternal grant unto them.

Et lux perpetua luceat eis. And may light perpetual shine upon them.

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine. Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord.

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills: from whence cometh my help.

My help cometh even from the Lord: who hath made heaven and earth.

He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: and he that keepeth thee will not sleep.

Behold, he that keepeth Israel: shall neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord himself is thy keeper: he is thy defence upon thy right hand.

So that the sun shall not burn thee by day: neither the moon by night.

The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: yea, it is even he that shall keep thy soul.

The Lord shall preserve thy going out, and thy coming in: from this time forth and for evermore.

Requiem aeternam dona eis. Rest eternal grant unto them.

Et lux perpetua luceat eis. And may light perpetual shine upon them.

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine. Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord.

I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, from henceforth blessed are the dead which die in the Lord: even so saith the Spirit; for they rest from their labours.

William H Harris (1883-1973)

Bring us, O Lord God (1959)

John Donne

Bring us, O Lord God, at our last awakening
Into the house and gate of heaven,

To enter into that gate and dwell in that house,
Where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling,
But one equal light;

No noise nor silence, but one equal music;
No fears nor hopes, but one equal possession;
No ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity;
In the habitations of thy glory and dominion,
World without end. Amen.