



CANBERRA
BACH
ENSEMBLE



St Christopher's Cathedral
Saturday 11 September 1999

The Canberra Bach Ensemble

The Canberra Bach Ensemble is a recently established group of choristers and instrumentalists who have a strong interest and devotion to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. The performances for the remainder of this year are in preparation for a series of concerts to be presented in 2000 for the 250th anniversary of Bach's death. The CBE is primarily dedicated to performing Bach's sacred repertory, namely cantatas, oratorios, motets, masses and organ works. The CBE also performs suitable and compatible works by other composers.

The CBE has chosen Bach's repertory to be its central focus of performance because the aesthetic, intellectual and spiritual integrity of his music is of the highest order. Bach's compositional output demonstrates a sophisticated web of musical and liturgical relationships which is endlessly fascinating. It is a most satisfying experience to identify and explore the relationships between hundreds of sacred works across various genre, in order to reveal the depth, breadth and intensity of Bach's creative craft.

Tonight's a capella program moves across the channel to the works of William Byrd and Henry Purcell. Byrd's *Great Service* is one of the significant choral monuments of the late Renaissance, and rarely performed in its entirety. This substantial work is Byrd's most involved setting of the canticles of the Anglican liturgy (Venite, Te Deum etc). The manner in which Byrd has set these familiar texts reveals how expressive compositional style was in this time, and still feels so even as the work has passed through the centuries. Byrd's treatment of the words and text phrases is intense and dynamic, despite the archaic idiom.

The four anthems by Purcell are intense in their expressive power, contributing an important dimension to English sacred music of his time. The expressive power of these anthems reveals a different side of Purcell's style other than that which characterises his operas.

A CBE concert would not be complete without a work by Bach – tonight we present his unaccompanied motet *Komm, Jesu Komm* BWV 229 to conclude our performance. The performance of this work anticipates the cantatas that will be presented in two weeks time.

We hope you will be able to join us on Sunday 26 September at 2.30pm when the choir, orchestra and soloists of the Canberra Bach Ensemble will perform two cantatas – *Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht mit deinem Knecht* BWV 105 and *Brich dem Hungrigen dein Brot* BWV 39 – as well as the *Missa Brevis* in G minor BWV 235.

Andrew Koll

William Byrd (1543-1623)

The Great Service (1580s)

Venite

Te Deum

Benedictus

Creed

Magnificat

Nunc Dimittis

Interval

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Four Anthems (1680s)

Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts

Lord, how long wilt thou be angry?

Remember not, Lord, our offences

Hear my prayer, O Lord

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

Motet

Komm, Jesu, komm BWV 229 (1730)

In Byrd's time it was normal to set the *canticles* (ie. the standard texts used in worship) according to the principle of 'for every syllable a note', a form which became known – albeit much later – as the 'Short' Service. In this form, the choir sings each word together, note against note, and there is only one note sung for each syllable of the text. Indeed, Byrd wrote such a Short Service for four voices, containing settings of all seven canticles used in Anglican worship, (almost always) conforming to these principles.

In contrast, a more elaborate, extended form was also permitted, and some compositions in this freer style came to be labeled as 'Great' Services, although this label probably referred to the length and scope of such works, and not to considerations of form and structure. Byrd's *Great Service* is not only one of his finest compositions, but one of the most important works of the period. In scale (if not in opulence) it is surpassed only by the *Great Service* of Thomas Tomkins, who, perhaps not surprisingly, was one of Byrd's students.

For his *Great Service*, Byrd took full advantage of the vocal forces available to him: the usual cathedral choir consisted of two choirs of five voices each (mean, two countertenors, tenor, and bass). There is only a tiny fragment of ten-part polyphony; instead, for the most part he wrote only four to six parts, occasionally employing seven or eight. Sometimes one choir will sing by itself, sometimes the choirs sing antiphonally (ie. alternating rapidly), sometimes all together, and all the while the different voices continually enter and leave, creating an aural kaleidoscope of vocal textures.

The score distinguishes the two choirs, known as *decani* (on your right) and *cantoris* (on your left), as well as between 'verse' and 'full' sections. For this performance, the 'verse' sections have been allocated to the choirs alternately: they will be sung by the *cantoris* in the *Venite*, the *decani* in the *Te Deum*, etc. The 'full' sections are for the whole choir. The *Kyrie*, which is a short, simple response to the chanting of the ten commandments, is omitted.

One of the most striking aspects of the *Great Service* is the extraordinary variety of rhythmic patterns employed. Not only is there no consistent time signature for much of the work, but there are also numerous daring syncopations, sometimes combined with soloistic ornamentation.

Four of the movements – the *Venite*, *Benedictus*, *Magnificat*, and *Nunc Dimittis* – are bound together through the use of a 'head-motive', ie. a series of notes used, with only little alteration, at the beginning of each movement. Apart from these obvious 'cross references', there are also subtle similarities between movements. Some seem to be deliberate; it has been suggested that some others are subconscious at best, if not purely accidental.

The Great Service

Venite (Psalm 95)

O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving: and shew ourselves glad in him with Psalms. For the Lord is a great God: and a great King above all gods. In his hand are all the corners of the earth: and the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands prepared the dry land.

O come, let us worship, and fall down: and kneel before the Lord our Maker. For he is the Lord our God: and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts: as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness; When your fathers tempted me: proved me, and saw my works.

Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said: It is a people that do err in their hearts, for they have not known my ways. Unto whom I swear in my wrath: that they should not enter into my rest.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, and is now, and ever shall be world without end. Amen.

Te Deum

We praise thee, O God: We knowledge thee to be the Lord. All the earth doth worship thee, the Father everlasting. To thee all Angels cry aloud: the Heavens, and all the Powers therein. To thee Cherubin, and Seraphin continually do cry, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth; Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty of thy Glory. The glorious company of the Apostles praise thee. The noble army of Martyrs praise thee.

The Holy Church throughout all the world doth knowledge thee, the Father of an infinite Majesty; Thine honourable, true, and only Son; Also the Holy Ghost, the Comforter. Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ. Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father. When thou took'st upon thee to deliver man, thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb, When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.

Thou sittest at the right hand of God, in the Glory of the Father. We believe that thou shalt come to be our Judge. We therefore pray thee, help thy servants, whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood. Make them to be numbered with thy Saints in glory everlasting. O Lord, save thy people, and bless thine heritage. Govern them, and lift them up for ever.

Day by day we magnify thee; And we worship thy Name ever world without end. Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin. O Lord, have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us. O Lord, in thee have I trusted: Let me never be confounded.

Benedictus (Luke 1: 68-79)

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people; And hath raised up a mighty salvation for us: in the house of his servant David. As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets: which have been since the world began; That we should be saved from our enemies: and from the hands of all that hate us; To perform the mercy promised to our forefathers: and to remember his holy Covenant; To perform the oath which he swore to our forefather Abraham: that he would give us; That we being delivered out of the hands of our enemies: might serve him without

fear; in holiness and righteousness before him: all the days of our life.

And thou child shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people: for the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God: Whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us; To give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death: and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost: As it was in the beginning, and is now, and ever shall be world without end. Amen.

Creed

I believe in one God, The Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, And of all things visible and invisible: And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, Begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father; By whom all things were made, who for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven, And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, And was made man, And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.

He suffered and was buried, And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, And ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory, To judge both the quick and the dead: Whose Kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and giver of life, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son together Is worshipped and glorified, Who spake by the Prophets. And I believe one Catholick and Apostolick Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins, And I look for the Resurrection of the dead, And the life of the world to come. Amen.

Magnificat (Luke 1: 46–55)

My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit rejoiceth in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden. For behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath magnified me and holy is his name.

And his mercy is on them that fear him, throughout all generations. He hath showed strength with his arm: he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away. He rememb'ring his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel. As he promised to our forefather Abraham and to his seed for ever.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning and is now, and ever shall be world without end. Amen.

Nunc Dimittis (Luke 2: 29–32)

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word, For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people. To be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of thy people Israel.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning and is now, and ever shall be world without end. Amen.

Purcell: Anthems

Purcell's anthems have formed part of the staple diet of cathedral and church choirs for centuries. This evening you will hear four, which despite their unity of theme – penitence and a cry for restoration – cover a broad range of musical styles. Certainly, 'Hear my prayer', a setting for two choirs, is the most expansive of the four. But the other anthems would best be described as *deceptively* simple. For example, 'Remember not' is mostly homophonic (the choir singing the words together) with a short polyphonic section in the middle. But in the last section there are some bold harmonic shifts, typical of Purcell; listen for the two occurrences of the words 'with us for ever', at which Purcell breaks a number of rules to startling effect.

Thou knowest, Lord

(The Book of Common Prayer)

Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts. Shut not thy merciful ears unto our prayers; but spare us, Lord most holy. O God most mighty, O holy and most merciful Saviour, thou most worthy judge eternal, suffer us not at our last hour for any pains of death to fall from thee. Amen.

Lord, how long wilt thou be angry?

(Psalm 79, vv. 5, 8, 9, 13)

Lord, how long wilt thou be angry? Shall thy jealousy burn like fire for ever? O remember not our old sins, but have mercy upon us, and that soon: for we are come to great misery. Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name; O deliver us, and be merciful unto our sins, for thy name's sake. So we, that are thy people and the sheep of thy pasture, shall give thee thanks for ever: and will always be shewing forth thy praise from one generation to another.

Remember not, Lord, our offences

Remember not, Lord, our offences, nor th'offences of our forefathers; neither take thou vengeance of our sins, good Lord, but spare us, good Lord, spare thy people, whom thou hast redeemed with thy most precious blood, and be not angry with us for ever. Spare us, good Lord.

Hear my prayer, O Lord

Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my crying come unto thee.

Bach: Motet

Bach's motets are the pinnacle of a musical tradition that extends back to the thirteenth century. Ever conscious of such traditions, Bach did not set out to write motets that were very different from those of his predecessors and contemporaries. Bach's musical fingerprints are to be found throughout his motets, but in general they are quite typical of the form. In the case of *Komm, Jesu, komm*, Johann Schelle, one of Bach's predecessors as Thomaskantor in Leipzig, had himself used the very same text as the basis of a motet.

Bach used the first and last verses of Paul Thymich's poem, itself based loosely on John 14:6 ('I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me'), and set each in quite different ways. The first part uses the two choirs antiphonally, in ways reminiscent of the crowd scenes in the passions. In form, it ranges from simple block chords (the opening) through fugue ('der saure Weg') to free counterpoint; there are also several changes in pace along the way, each in response to the text. The second part is a chorale-like setting, ending in a final elaboration of the last few words.

Komm, Jesu, komm, BWV 229 (text by Paul Thymich)

Komm, Jesu, komm, mein Leib ist müde, die Kraft verschwind't je mehr und mehr, ich sehne mich nach deinem Frieden; der saure Weg wird mir zu schwer! Komm, komm, ich will mich dir ergeben; du bist der rechte Weg, die Wahrheit und das Leben.

Come, O Jesus, come, my body is tired, my strength is vanishing more and more, I long for your peace; the bitter path is becoming too hard for me! Come, come, I will surrender myself to you; you are the sure way, the truth, and the life.

Drauf schließ ich mich in deine Hände und sage, Welt, zu guter Nacht! Eilt gleich mein Lebenslauf zu Ende, ist doch der Geist wohl angebracht. Er soll bei seinem Schöpfer schweben, weil Jesus ist und bleibt der wahre Weg zum Leben.

So I encircle myself in your hands and say to the world, good night! My life's course will soon be rushing to an end; my spirit is certainly ready. Let it soar with its creator, because Jesus is, and remains, the true way to life.

Notes and translation © 1999 by Richard Walker.

Further reading and listening

Edmund H. Fellowes, *William Byrd*, second edition, Oxford University Press, 1948.

John Harley, *William Byrd: gentleman of the Chapel Royal*, Scolar Press, 1997.

Recordings by The Tallis Scholars (*The Great Service*), The Sixteen, and The Taverner Consort (*Komm, Jesu, komm*).

Andrew Koll (Director)

Having completed his honours degree in musicology last year at the Canberra School of Music, Andrew is currently completing a Masters in conducting at the Sydney Conservatorium with Henryk Pisarek and Mats Nilsson. Andrew recently concluded a successful three year association with the Canberra Community Orchestra, performing a wide range of symphonic repertoire from the classical period through to the twentieth century, included new works by Neylon and Elizondo. Last year, Andrew attended a masterclass on Bach's motets with Stuttgart conductor Frieder Bernius in Namur, Belgium. Andrew's main interest and research area is on Bach's music and the evolution of performing trends over the last half century.

choristers

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Lucie Alexander
Kate Atkinson
Helen Thomson
Alice Richardson

Tenor

Marco Agostini
James Carter
Graeme Hill
Cameron Neylon

Alto

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The Canberra Bach Ensemble will stage its next performance on Sunday 26 September at 2.30pm.

Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht BWV 105

Brich dem Hungrigen dein Brot BWV 39

Missa Brevis in G minor BWV 235

Choir and orchestra with:

Helen Thomson

Peter Campbell

Marco Agostini

Richard Anderson

Tickets now available - \$10/\$5 tonight only.

