



VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Dona nobis pacem
(Cantata)

Sancta Civitas
(Oratorio)

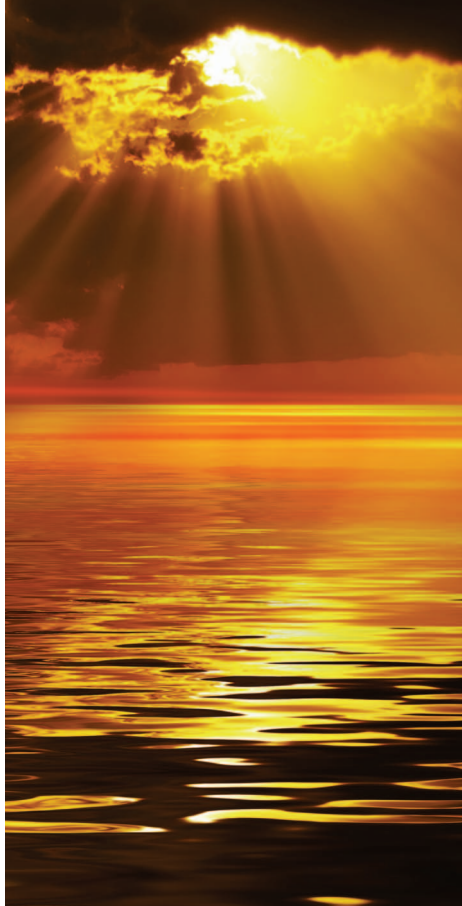
Pier • Brook • Staples

The Bach Choir

**Winchester Cathedral
Choristers • Winchester
College Quiristers**

**Bournemouth Symphony
Orchestra**

David Hill



Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)

Dona nobis pacem • Sancta Civitas

Dona nobis pacem

33:29

(A Cantata for Soprano and Baritone Soli, Chorus and Orchestra)

- | | | |
|----------|---|-------|
| 1 | I. Agnus Dei (Lento) | 3:29 |
| 2 | II. Beat! beat! drums! (Allegro moderato) | 3:31 |
| 3 | III. Reconciliation (Allegro moderato) | 5:21 |
| 4 | IV. Dirge for Two Veterans (Moderato alla marcia) | 10:07 |
| 5 | V. The Angel of Death has been abroad (L'istesso tempo) – | 3:29 |
| 6 | O man greatly beloved | 7:32 |

Sancta Civitas

31:10

(An Oratorio for Baritone and Tenor Soli, Chorus, Semi-chorus, Distant Chorus and Orchestra)

- | | | |
|-----------|---|------|
| 7 | I was in the spirit (Lento) | 5:32 |
| 8 | And I Saw Heaven opened (Allegro) | 2:13 |
| 9 | And I saw an angel standing in the sun (Meno mosso) | 1:13 |
| 10 | Babylon the great is fallen (Lento) | 4:41 |
| 11 | Rejoice over her O Heavens (Allegro moderato) | 3:05 |
| 12 | And I saw a new heaven (Adagio) | 4:33 |
| 13 | Therefore are they before the throne of God (Poco meno largo) | 0:55 |
| 14 | And I saw a pure river | 2:23 |
| 15 | Holy, Holy, Holy (Andante sostenuto) | 0:53 |
| 16 | Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory (Poco animato) | 5:42 |

Christina Pier, Soprano • Andrew Staples, Tenor

Matthew Brook, Baritone

The Bach Choir • Winchester Cathedral Choristers

Winchester College Quiristers • Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra

David Hill

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)

Dona nobis pacem • Sancta Civitas

Ralph Vaughan Williams studied at the Royal College of Music and at Cambridge. His teachers included Parry, Stanford and later Ravel in Paris. From the outset of his career he determined to write music that would break away from the domination of European traditions; this desire led him to English folk-song and the music of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, from which his own voice emerged. In 1901 the song *Linden Lea* first brought him to public attention and in the years that followed he was an assiduous collector of folk-songs and editor of *The English Hymnal* (1906). To this early period also belong *On Wenlock Edge* (1908-9) and *A Sea Symphony* (1903-8), the first of nine symphonies that form the backbone of his achievement.

The *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* (1910), the first expression of his fully mature voice, was followed by *A London Symphony* (1911-13) before World War I interrupted his career. To the interwar years belong *A Pastoral Symphony* (1921), the *Fourth Symphony* (1931-4), the 'masque for dancing' *Job* (1927-30), and the operas *Sir John in Love* (1924-8) and *Riders to the Sea* (1925-32). The *Fifth Symphony* (1938-43) was seemingly the definitive statement of an artist reaching the autumn of life, so that the equally individual *Sixth Symphony* (1944-7), with its desolate *Épilogue*, caught critics by surprise. A commission to write music for the film *Scott of the Antarctic* led to the *Seventh Symphony (Sinfonia Antartica, 1949–52)*; to the final years of his life belong the completion, after forty years gestating, of the opera *The Pilgrim's Progress* (finished 1949), and the *Eighth* (1953–6) and *Ninth Symphony* (1956–8).

In *Sancta Civitas* (The Holy City), Vaughan Williams arguably revealed his beliefs as man and artist more than in any other of his compositions. Composed between 1923 and 1925, it sets words from the *Book of Revelations* in the Authorised Version with additions from Taverner's Bible. By this time Vaughan Williams described himself as 'a cheerful agnostic', but one who was nevertheless steeped in the tradition of the Anglican Church, so that by choosing texts with which his audiences were familiar they

could be used as powerful symbols. Here the biblical words and the battle between good and evil become a symbol of humankind's destructive nature and its severance from the natural order. The burning intensity of the message of *Sancta Civitas* is still only too relevant today.

The text too deals with the possibility of life after death as imagined in St John of Patmos's Christian eschatological revelation. Through his inscription from Plato's *Phaedo* prefacing the score, however, Vaughan Williams broadens the context from a purely Christian one. In this passage Socrates, soon to be executed, meditates on the immortality of the soul. In F.J. Church's translation, he proposes that: 'A man of sense will not insist that things are exactly as I have described them. But I think he will believe that something of the kind is true of the soul and her habitations, seeing that she is shown to be immortal, and that it is worthwhile to stake everything on this belief. The venture is a fair one and he must charm his doubts with spells like these.'

Finally it was through his art as a composer that Vaughan Williams felt that he touched these mysteries, as he reflected in an essay *The Letter and the Spirit*, in 1920, which succinctly summarises his beliefs: 'may we take it that the object of all art is to obtain a partial revelation of that which is beyond human senses and human faculties – of that in fact which is spiritual? And that the means we employ to induce this revelation are those very senses and faculties themselves? The human, visible, audible and intelligible media which artists (of all kinds) use, are symbols not of other visible and audible things *but of what lies beyond sense and knowledge.*'

Sancta Civitas was given its première in Oxford on 7th May 1926 by the Oxford Bach Choir and Orchestral Society, with Arthur Cranmer, baritone, and Trefor Jones, tenor, conducted by Hugh Allen. Vaughan Williams himself conducted the first London performance, on 9th June, this time with The Bach Choir, of which he was then Musical Director. It is one of Vaughan Williams's most original works in its concept and is his only choral work to

be designated 'oratorio'. His use of choral forces is bold and striking as he exploits the colours of a full chorus, a semi-chorus and a distant chorus which is ideally to be invisible and comprise boys' voices; performing alongside this group is a lone trumpeter.

In the brief orchestral prelude, Vaughan Williams deftly evokes a sense of the numinous. The baritone begins his narration surrounded by haloes of alleluias; from afar the distant chorus, always prefaced by trumpet, joins in the paen. Gradually the music rises to a climax as the omnipotence of God is proclaimed.

With a blazing trumpet fanfare, Heaven is revealed, and to vivid, fast music, the rider on a white horse, poised to wreak havoc on the transgressors, is portrayed. At the ensuing climax the name of the rider, 'King of Kings' is announced. To an urgent falling string phrase and pounding timpani, the angel standing in the sun musters the armies of the heavenly host for the conflict. Battle is enjoined and the kings of the earth and their armies are destroyed to dramatic wails of 'slain'.

An extended elegy for *Babylon* follows, (the city becoming a symbol of humankind's dislocation from the Godhead), bound together by the recurring plangent refrain '*Babylon the great is fallen*'. A cor anglais solo brings the lamentations to a close. With a radiant key change to E major a solo violin offers consolation as the evocation of the new heaven and new earth unfolds in rapt music, finally surging to an exultant climax on the word '*ever*', before the violin fades away.

The distant choir intone '*Holy, Holy*', before a hymn of praise breaks out culminating in an orchestral explosion of sonorous brass and crashing cymbals. But finally, in an inspired compositional master-stroke, it is the tenor soloist, making his sole appearance, who affirms in his floating, poignant melody the new covenant between God and humanity who murmur in hushed pleading '*even so come Lord*' as the vision fades.

Dona nobis pacem is both a prayer and a warning. On a universal level the cantata is a prayer that mankind will mature to discard warfare and strife; in the particular context of its time, it is a warning that the unstable political situation of the 1930s was sliding disastrously towards another war. Because it is the prayer that is uppermost in

the work's dynamic, Vaughan Williams does not allude to specific contemporary events, but the message is clear; all the more so by the universality of the texts, setting a fragment of the Latin Mass, Walt Whitman, John Bright and conflations from the Bible.

The choice of texts is typical of Vaughan Williams: Whitman the poet so admired by his generation for his freedom of thought and form; the 1611 Authorised Version of the Bible, part and parcel of anyone born into the Anglican tradition at that time; and lastly, John Bright, reflecting the liberal, radical background of his Wedgwood and Darwin ancestors. The cantata, cast in five movements, was composed in 1936 to a commission from the Huddersfield Choral Society and was first performed at their centenary concert on 2nd October 1936; Albert Coates was the conductor; Renée Flynn and Roy Henderson, the soloists.

From the outset the music of the *Agnus Dei* creates a mood suggestive of the imminence of an unknown danger. This is created by the briefest of orchestral preludes, a unison D becoming a chord where the semitone clash of C sharp/D is the telling root of the tension. The soprano takes up the interval on the word '*Dona*', and as such it becomes symbolic throughout the work of mankind's plea for peace. Chorus and soprano intone the prayer alternatively quietly and in desperate outbursts of near despair. The movement closes with the soprano's semitonal '*pacem*' pleas sullied by the realities of the approach of war as hinted at by the percussion.

In the second movement, the '*drums*' and '*bugles*' of Whitman's lines from *Drumtaps* find their equivalent in music as the conflict breaks out. The effect of war on the community and the common man is the subject. All other considerations are swept aside; war dominates. In death, peace is found between enemies. As the baritone sings the opening line of Whitman's *Reconciliation*, for the first time in the cantata there is a glimpse of a world free from strife. In the meantime the scars of war are healed in a mood of serenity. At the close the soprano appropriately reiterates her plea '*Dona nobis pacem*', but now with a poignant minor third to complete her phrase.

The honouring of the dead of battle, the ritualistic burial of heroes now takes the foreground in this

magnificent setting of Whitman's *Dirge for Two Veterans*. It dates back to 1908 but the composer, sensing that it belonged within the context of a larger piece, set it aside until it found its natural place in this work nearly thirty years later. Slow military tattoos and the tread of the dead march portray the processional to the grave. The movement's noble hymn-like melodies are a reminder of Vaughan Williams's twin affinity with the Anglican tradition and folk-song. Notable musical imagery includes the alliterative 'dropped' as the veterans fall one after the other.

The first part of the final movement reaches the nadir of bleakness; there is no respite from the Angel of Death despite a further desperate outcry for peace. Jeremiah's words of anguish become all the more poignant being set

as a canon between the men's and the women's voices, as though they are utterly trapped in a situation from which there is no escape. With a change of key to D flat major, however, the nodal point of the work is reached and a new mood ushered in by the baritone's message of hope. The chorus takes up the vision of a world without strife and at the end the soprano's prayer has attained concord with no hint of semitonal angst. During the final chorus both the music itself and the orchestration clearly suggest the pealing of bells. Surely these are the bells of the English churches?, the bells that soon would be silenced for several years, but which would ring out jubilantly, as in the music here, on 8th May 1945.

Andrew Burn

Christina Pier



Christina Pier is the recipient of numerous prestigious awards, including a 2003 Grand Finals Winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, George London Award, Sullivan Award, two Charles A. Lynam Awards, and two Palm Beach Opera Competition Awards. She has been seen as Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*, the Countess in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte* and Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte*. Other rôles include Micaëla in *Carmen* and Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust*. She has performed leading rôles with the Santa Fe Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Minnesota Opera, and Nashville Opera. In concert and recital she has performed in venues throughout Italy, China, and the United States, including the Washington National Cathedral and the General Assembly Hall of the United Nations. Originally from Flagstaff, Arizona, Christina Pier received a BM and MM in voice at Indiana University where she studied with Virginia Zeani.

Andrew Staples



Andrew Staples studied at the Royal College of Music and subsequently joined the Benjamin Britten International Opera School. His concert engagements include Swedish Radio and the London Symphony Orchestra with Daniel Harding, the Swedish Chamber Orchestra and Scottish Chamber Orchestra with Andrew Manze, the Gävle Symphony with Robin Ticciati, and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra with Sir Simon Rattle. On stage he has performed Aret (Haydn's *Philemon und Baucis*) with Trevor Pinnock, Haliarte (Handel's *Sosarme*) with Laurence Cummings and Don Ottavio (*Don Giovanni*) with Andrew Parrott. For the BBIOS he sang Male Chorus (*The Rape of Lucretia*), Ferrando (*Così fan tutte*) and Eisenstein (*Die Fledermaus*). He sang his first Tamino for Opera Holland Park and has appeared regularly with the Classical Opera Company.

Photo: Sussie Ahlburg

Matthew Brook



Matthew Brook has appeared as a soloist throughout Europe, Australia, South Africa and the Far East, and has worked with Oleg Caetani, Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Richard Hickox, Sir Charles Mackerras, Harry Christophers, Christophe Rousset and Paul McCreesh, and ensembles including the Philharmonia, London Symphony Orchestra, Freiburg Baroque Orchestra, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Gabrieli Consort, the Sixteen, Les Talens Lyriques, Orchestra Nationale de Lille and Orchestre des Champs-Élysées. His recordings include Berlioz's *L'enfance du Christ* with Hickox and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, Handel's *Acis and Galatea* and a Gramophone Award-winning *Messiah* with the Dunedin Consort. He has performed Zuniga in *Carmen* at the Opéra Comique, Bach's *St Matthew Passion* and Haydn's *The Seasons*, both with Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* with Richard Hickox, Bach's *Mass in B minor* and *St Matthew Passion* with Collegium Vocale Gent and Philippe Herreweghe,

Handel's *Messiah* with Harry Christophers and The Sixteen, and *Il Re* in Handel's *Ariondante* with Alan Curtis and Il Complesso Barocco.

Winchester Cathedral Choristers and Winchester College Quiristers

The Winchester Cathedral Choristers and Winchester College Quiristers are all educated at The Pilgrims' School, and sing evensong together once each term. The Boy Choristers of Winchester Cathedral, together with the lay clerks, sing an average of eight services each week as well as at Christmas and Easter. They are widely recognized as one of the country's leading cathedral choirs. Apart from the daily services, they are involved in radio and television broadcasts, recordings and tours throughout this country and abroad. Winchester College was founded in 1382, and Winchester College Quiristers have sung over 625 sung services in Winchester College Chapel. They perform a wide variety of music and sing on their own as a concert choir, and also as Winchester College Chapel Choir, when they are joined by senior boys from the College. They frequently appear on television and radio and three times recently, Quiristers have won the title of BBC Young Chorister of the Year.



The Bach Choir



Photo: Edward Webb

and, under his direction, the Choir has extended its repertoire with new and challenging works, now aiming to commission new choral music every two years.

For further information please visit www.thebachchoir.org.uk

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra



Photo: Chris Zuidyk

continues to release numerous CDs each year with Naxos. Recent critically acclaimed recordings have included CDs of Bernstein, Bartók, Sibelius, Glass, Adams and Elgar, and three discs featuring arrangements of Mussorgsky, Bach and Wagner by Stokowski were nominated for GRAMMY awards in 2004, 2005 and 2006.

The Bach Choir has long been established as one of the world's leading choruses. A succession of eminent musical directors, including Sir Charles Villiers Stanford, Dr Ralph Vaughan Williams, Sir David Willcocks and now David Hill, has each ensured that the Choir performs to the highest standards. The Choir's consistent excellence has resulted in invitations to sing in prestigious venues, and with the very best professional orchestras and soloists. The Bach Choir has some 220 active members, talented singers from all walks of life, all of whom are committed to a challenging schedule of up to twenty concerts in a season, as well as recordings, special engagements and overseas tours which have included Australia, the United States, South Africa and Europe. David Hill has been Musical Director of The Bach Choir since 1998

David Hill

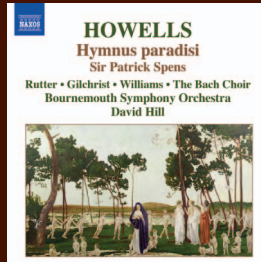


Photo: Edward Webb

Renowned for his fine musicianship, David Hill is widely respected as both a choral and an orchestral conductor. He became The Bach Choir's ninth Musical Director in 1998; he is also Chief Conductor of the BBC Singers, Associate Guest Conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Chief Conductor of the Southern Sinfonia and Music Director of the Leeds Philharmonic Society. Born in Carlisle and educated at Chetham's School of Music, David Hill became a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists at the age of seventeen. Having been Organ Scholar at St John's College, Cambridge, he returned to hold the post of Director of Music from 2004 to 2007. His other appointments have included Master of the Music at Winchester Cathedral, Master of the Music at Westminster Cathedral and Artistic Director of the Philharmonia Chorus. David Hill has a broad-ranging discography covering repertoire from Thomas Tallis to Judith Bingham. He has achieved prestigious Grammy and Gramophone Awards, and many of his discs have been recommended as Critics' Choices.



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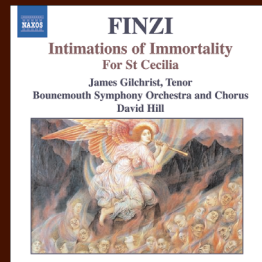
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Although Vaughan Williams described himself as ‘a cheerful agnostic’, he was not only steeped in the traditions of the Anglican Church, but sensitive to the mystical significance ‘of what lies beyond sense and knowledge’. Written in 1936, his cantata *Dona nobis pacem* sets powerful Biblical texts alongside those by Walt Whitman and John Bright and is both a warning that mankind was sliding disastrously towards another war and a plea for a world without strife. The oratorio *Sancta Civitas*, one of his most original choral works, strikingly deploys vocal and orchestral forces to depict the battle between good and evil from the Book of Revelation.

Ralph
VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
(1872–1958)

1-6 *Dona nobis pacem* * **33:29**

A Cantata for Soprano and Baritone Soli, Chorus and Orchestra

7-16 *Sancta Civitas* § **31:10**

An Oratorio for Baritone and Tenor Soli, Chorus
Semi-Chorus, Distant Chorus and Orchestra

Christina Pier, Soprano * • Matthew Brook, Baritone
Andrew Staples, Tenor §
The Bach Choir • Winchester Cathedral Choristers §
Winchester College Quiristers §
Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra • David Hill

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