



George
DYSON

Choral Symphony

St Paul's Voyage to Melita

Elizabeth Watts, Soprano • Caitlin Hulcup, Mezzo-soprano

Joshua Ellicott, Tenor • Roderick Williams, Baritone

The Bach Choir

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra

David Hill

Sir George Dyson (1883–1964)

Choral Symphony • St Paul's Voyage to Melita

George Dyson was born in Halifax in 1883 and was one of the most important British musicians of his day. Coming from a solidly working-class family (his father was a blacksmith working in one of the great Halifax engineering companies) they were pillars of the local Baptist church where George had his first musical experiences. His early talent was quickly recognised and he won a Foundation Scholarship to the Royal College of Music in London aged only 16 to study organ, first, and composition later (with Stanford). He later returned to the college as the first alumnus to become its director (1938–1952).

Following a highly formative Mendelssohn Scholarship period in Italy and Germany he returned to begin a long career in school teaching. Sir Hubert Parry recommended him for his first appointment at the Royal Naval College, Osborne, which had been founded to double the number of cadets entering the Navy in prevision, though this was not known at the time, of the world hostilities to come. Dyson's appointment was something of an experiment as music was the last thing on most people's minds in such an establishment. In reality, he thus had quite a lot of time to himself and he determined to use it profitably. He knew that if he wanted to progress to the greater public schools he would need a degree in music preferably from Oxford or Cambridge. Thus, he enrolled as a non-collegiate student at Oxford and took his BMus successfully in 1909, moving straight on to the DMus which was conferred in 1917. It was for this examination that his *Choral Symphony* was written. The work was unknown before the research I undertook for his biography and it was a remarkable and exciting discovery in the Bodleian Library at Oxford.

Dyson called the symphony 'Psalm CVII Symphony (for solo, chorus and orchestra) and Overture'. Psalm 107 is a dramatic telling of the expulsion of the Jews from Israel by the Babylonians. The Jews had been imprisoned for 70 years before being able to return home. The Psalm tells the story of their wrongdoing, their prayers for forgiveness, God's mercy, their treacherous journey home by sea, their rehabilitation in their homeland, and their praise to God for safe deliverance.

What is remarkable in this work is Dyson's obvious command of a really large-scale structure. In all likelihood he chose Psalm 107 because of its variety of dramatic images and its suitability for breaking down into a four movement format. The first movement opens with a lengthy orchestral *Overture* which sets the scene and presents the thematic material for the whole first movement. The main choral movement follows without break. Here he presents some of the trademarks which make his later works so attractive: the sense of musical line; Parry-like use of strongly contrapuntal interplay between voices; an inherent sense of drama, especially his ability to work a long paragraph up to an exciting climax, often using constantly increasing tempi to build tension; and his ingenious use of imaginative harmony at key points. There are extended sections scored for double choir in two formations: SSAATTBB and SATB/SATB.

The second movement is in C minor which is a big aural leap from the E major ending which precedes it. It is an uneasy *Allegro agitato, ma non troppo* in 6/8 which takes its cue from the text (verses 4–8): 'They went astray in the wilderness out of the way, and found no city to dwell in.'

The third movement moves to A minor and is marked *Largo*. It begins with a plangent theme for violins who play in unison for the first 16 bars *pianissimo* or *ppp*. The music reflects the darkness of the image: 'such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death'. The final section is a remarkable transformation into a broad, triumphant progression in the major before subsiding into a quiet ending.

The final movement begins as a seascape taking its cue from the words: 'They that go down to the sea in ships, and occupy their business in great waters; these men see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep.'

Dyson so often came into his own when setting sea-related texts, as we will see in the other work on this recording, *St Paul's Voyage to Melita*. Here, then, he sets out with a figure instantly recognisable as a 'turbulent sea' motif and closely related to the third movement of Debussy's *La Mer: Dialogue du vent et de la mer*. The movement

builds to an incandescent climax close to the end with a wonderful breadth of expression and ends emphatically with two linked but declamatory orchestral chords.

The *Choral Symphony* should be widely taken up and performed as an alternative to the other great maritime work of the period, Vaughan Williams' *A Sea Symphony*.

By the 1930s Dyson had enjoyed considerable success with two very different choral works: *In Honour of the City* and *The Canterbury Pilgrims*. This last, hugely enjoyable work, was performed all over the world and was conducted at least 35 times by Dyson himself. It was inevitable that after these successes the Three Choirs Festival would ask Dyson to compose a new work for them. He responded with *St Paul's Voyage to Melita* for the 1933 Festival at Hereford and conducted the performance himself. Dyson chose the dramatic story from Chapter 27 of the Acts of the Apostles telling of St Paul's remarkable journey to Rome up to the point of his shipwreck on the island of Malta (Melita). Paul had been warned about possible trouble if he visited Jerusalem but insisted on going, even if it led to his death. When he got there, word had spread that he preached to both Gentiles and Jews. This led to a riot which caused his arrest. Paul invoked his right to be judged by Caesar himself in Rome, and so his long journey began. The irony was that King Agrippa had a mind to release him had he not appealed to Caesar in this way. But the die was cast and so began the journey ending in shipwreck but the miraculous saving of all hands.

Here, then, was another dramatic text for Dyson to set. The critics were bemused by Dyson's choice and *The Times* noted that 'His music is neither oratorio in the accepted English sense of the term nor anthem, but narrative without comment.' Audiences at these festivals were used to oratorios with a moral to preach rather than simple drama for its own sake. They found the new approach difficult to understand or accept. But Dyson, who was not a religious man, loved vivid texts from which he could conjure Technicolor musical images. Also, as we found in the early *Choral Symphony*, he could create large-scale structures which unfolded seamlessly through a rare ability to navigate long paragraphs with great strength of purpose. Additionally, his imagination as an orchestrator, was second to none (his Oxford doctoral orchestration exercise was returned to him

by the professor of music because it was so highly regarded) and is put to the greatest test in this work.

St Paul's Voyage is scored for normal symphony orchestra with wind doublings, tenor solo and chorus. Ominous brass chords open the work and a semi-chorus delivers a choral recitative which begins the story: 'And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus's band.'

Mournful seagull calls set a bleak scene and seem to be a portent of disaster to come. But the unexpected warmth of the arrival at Fair Havens, a harbour on the south coast of Crete, is reflected in Dyson's richly coloured harmony. The weather was now becoming increasingly uncertain as it was late in the season but the decision was taken to sail on and soon the dreaded name of the north-easterly hurricane force wind, Euroclydon, was on everyone's lips. The storm music begins – violent waves, eddies, troughs and peaks. The ship begins to break up, ropes are passed underneath to bind it together. Dyson's use of augmented chords are descriptive of the crew's sense of panic. Paul assures them, in a passage of dramatic recitative, that all will be well and that no one will be lost. Land nears, and in an almost imperceptible change of rhythm from 3/4 into 9/8 Paul urges them to eat so they have energy for the final scene. The ship is run aground but the guards want to kill the prisoners in case they escape. Dyson's use of jagged, stuttering chords mirrors the terror of the moment. Finally, the centurion orders everyone to save themselves and the choir rises to an exultant, climactic moment in the phrase 'And so it came to pass that they escaped all', and the music subsides to end on a unison C for strings and bells.

These two major choral works show Dyson's originality and mastery of the form. In following this path he gave us a whole series of dramatic choral and orchestral works including *Nebuchadnezzar*, *The Blacksmiths*, *Agincourt*, *Sweet Thames run softly*, *Hierusalem*, and biggest of all, *Quo Vadis?* All deserve to be reinvestigated and to become once more an important part of our choral landscape.

Paul Spicer

Choral Symphony

❶ I. Overture (Psalm 107, verses 1–3)

O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is gracious and his mercy endureth for ever. Let them give thanks whom the Lord hath redeemed, and delivered from the hand of the enemy; and gathered them out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

❷ II. Allegro agitato, ma non troppo (Psalm 107, verses 4–8)

They went astray in the wilderness out of the way, and found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. So they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He led them forth by the right way, that they may go into the city where they dwell. O that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of men!

❸ III. Largo (Psalm 107, verses 10–16)

Such as sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death being fast bound in misery and iron; Because they rebelled against the word of the Lord and lightly regarded the counsel of the most Highest. He also brought down their heart through heaviness. They fell down, and there was none to help them. So when they cried unto the Lord in their trouble he delivered them out of their distress. For he brought them out of darkness, and out of the shadow of death, and brake their bonds in sunder. O that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of men! For he hath broken the gates of brass, and smitten the bars of iron in sunder.

❹ IV. Allegro molto (Psalm 107, verses 23–31, 35–37, 43)

They that go down to the sea in ships, and occupy their business in great waters; these men see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. For at his word a stormy wind ariseth, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They are carried up to the heaven and down again to the deep; their soul melteth away because of their trouble. They reel to and from and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end. So when they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, he delivereth them out of their distress. For he maketh the storm to cease so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad, because they are at rest and so he bringeth them unto the haven where they would be. O that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of men! He maketh the wilderness a standing water and water-springs of a dry ground. And there he setteth the hungry that they may build them a city to dwell in, that they may sow their land, and plant vineyards to yield them fruits of increase. O that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness. Whoso is wise will ponder these things and they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.

❺ St Paul's Voyage to Melita

(From Chapter XXVII of the Acts of the Apostles, Authorised and Revised versions)

AND WHEN IT was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus's band. And the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein. And when we had sailed slowly many days, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under the lee of Crete; and, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The Fair Havens.

Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the Fast was now already past, Paul admonished them,

'Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.' Nevertheless, the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul. And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter. And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close in shore.

But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, they let her drive. And running under the lee of a certain island, they had much work to come by the boat: which when they had hoisted it, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; and the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.

And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.

And when they had been long without food, Paul stood forth in the midst of them,

'Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss.

And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.

For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, Sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.'

But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in the sea of Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country; and sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms. Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast our anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.

And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let the boat down into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, 'Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.'

Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat and let her fall off.

And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat,

'This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your safety: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.'

And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat. Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.

And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship. And when they had cast off the anchors, they left them in the sea, and loosed the rudder-bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made towards shore. And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmovable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves. And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim out and escape. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: and the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.

Elizabeth Watts



Photo: Marco Borggreve

Soprano Elizabeth Watts won the 2007 Rosenblatt Recital Song Prize at the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World competition and the Outstanding Young Artist Award at the Cannes MIDEM Classique Awards as well as the 2006 Kathleen Ferrier Award. She is a former BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist and was awarded a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award in February 2011. She appears regularly on opera and concert stages across the United Kingdom and Europe, and has recorded for Sony Classical, Hyperion, Harmonia Mundi, Linn Records and Naxos. Watts was awarded an Hon DMus by Sheffield University in 2013 and became a Fellow of the Royal College of Music in 2017.

www.elizabethwattssoprano.com

Caitlin Hulcup



Photo: Robert Catto

The Australian mezzo-soprano Caitlin Hulcup made her debut at the Wiener Staatsoper in 2004 as Enriqueta in *I puritani* and since then she has sung numerous roles at some of the world's most prestigious opera houses including the Bolshoi Theatre, the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, the Deutsche Staatsoper, the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino and the Royal Opera House Covent Garden. Her performances of the title role in Handel's *Ariodante* at both the Barbican in London and the Teatro Real in Madrid with Les Talens Lyriques brought great critical acclaim. She has also sung Mahler's *Second Symphony* and *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* at the BBC Proms.

www.caitlinhulcup.com

Joshua Ellicott



Photo: Sime Saven

Manchester-born tenor Joshua Ellicott performs as a soloist throughout Europe, North America and the Far East. He trained at the University of York and at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and was the winner of the 2006 International Vocal Concours at 's-Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands. His career encompasses opera, oratorio and song repertoire and he is adept at interpreting early music through to contemporary works. He has sung with many leading conductors including Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Sir Mark Elder, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Harry Christophers, Sir Roger Norrington, Paul McCreesh, Robert King and Daniel Harding, and with many renowned orchestras and vocal ensembles.

www.joshuaellicott.com

Roderick Williams



Photo: Groves Artists

The British baritone Roderick Williams is active in the opera house, on the concert platform and in recital, encompassing a repertoire from the Baroque to world premieres. He is a widely sought-after soloist and has performed on many of the world's most prestigious stages. Williams has made numerous recordings including works by Vaughan Williams, Berkeley and Britten operas for Chandos, and an extensive repertoire of English song with pianist Iain Burnside for Naxos. In 2014 he was the featured soloist at the BBC Last Night of the Proms; in 2016 he won the Royal Philharmonic Society's Singer of the Year award; and in 2017 he was awarded an OBE for services to music.

The Bach Choir



Photo: Beaul Images and Photography

Founded in 1876, The Bach Choir is recognised as one of the world's leading choruses, building upon a tradition that combines musical excellence with creativity and innovation. From the first performance in Britain of Bach's *Mass in B minor* more than 140 years ago to the soundtrack for Ridley Scott's epic film *Prometheus*, the choir's musical heritage is as rich as it is diverse. Directed by David Hill, the choir regularly performs and records across London and the UK in prestigious venues, from the Royal Albert Hall to Abbey Road Studios. To date The Bach Choir has sung over 400 works in more than 120 venues, and has an active international touring schedule. Composers who have written works for the choir include Sir James MacMillan, Will Todd, Sir John Tavener, Bob Chilcott, Jonathan Dove and Carl Rütti.

The choir comprises over 250 talented singers from all walks of life and has a very successful outreach programme.

thebachchoir.org.uk/concerts

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra



Photo: Chris Zuidyk

The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra (BSO) remains at the forefront of the British orchestral music scene, continuing to serve communities across the South and South West of England, and extending its influence across the whole of the UK and internationally with regular festival appearances, an extensive catalogue of recordings and live broadcasts on BBC Radio 3. It is one of the most dynamic and innovative symphony orchestras in the UK today. Founded in 1893, the BSO has worked with many famous composers, conductors and musicians including Elgar, Sibelius, Holst, Stravinsky, Vaughan Williams and Sir Thomas Beecham, and more recently with Sir Michael Tippett, Sir John Tavener and Sir Peter Maxwell Davies. Principal conductors since the founder Sir Dan Godfrey have included Sir Charles Groves, Constantin Silvestri, Andrew Litton, Marin Alsop and now the dynamic young Ukrainian, Kirill Karabits. The BSO is known internationally through over 300 recordings, and continues to release numerous CDs each year with Naxos. Recent critically acclaimed recordings have included music by Bernstein, Bartók, Sibelius, Glass, Adams and Elgar, and three discs with José Serebrier featuring arrangements of Mussorgsky, Bach and Wagner by Stokowski were nominated for GRAMMY® awards in 2004, 2005 and 2006.

www.bsolive.com

David Hill



Photo: John Wood

Renowned for his fine musicianship, David Hill is widely respected as both a choral and orchestral conductor. He is music director of The Bach Choir and Leeds Philharmonic Society, associate guest conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and principal conductor of Yale Schola Cantorum. Until August 2017, he was chief conductor of the BBC Singers. His previous posts have included master of music at Winchester Cathedral and Westminster Cathedral, associate conductor and then artistic director of the Philharmonia Chorus and director of music at St John's College, Cambridge. David Hill has appeared as guest conductor with the symphony orchestras of London, Sydney and the RTÉ National as well as the Netherlands Radio Choir and RIAS Chamber Choir, Berlin. His wide-ranging discography of over 80 recordings includes many award winners and his commitment to new music has led to him premiering works from composers including Judith Bingham, Sir James Macmillan and Sir John Tavener.

Born into a working-class family, George Dyson became one of the most important musicians and composers of his day. The previously unknown *Choral Symphony* was written as an examination work while Dyson was studying at Oxford, and it was only recently discovered at the Bodleian Library. Dyson relishes his dramatic chosen text from Psalm 107 on the expulsion from and homecoming of the Jews to Israel, a narrative that inspires trademark features that would make his later works so attractive. Its seascape finale links neatly with *St Paul's Voyage to Melita*, another vivid text from which Technicolor musical images are conjured.



THE BACH CHOIR

Sir George
DYSON
(1883–1964)



Choral Symphony (1910)*

44:05

Psalm CVIL, for solo, chorus and orchestra

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| 1 | I. Overture: Adagio – Allegro energico – Adagio e tranquillo | 11:57 |
| 2 | II. Allegro agitato, ma non troppo – Quasi adagio e molto tranquillo
– Allegretto cantabile | 10:43 |
| 3 | III. Largo | 10:36 |
| 4 | IV. Allegro molto – Andante tranquillo – Con moto comodo | 10:50 |
| 5 | St Paul's Voyage to Melita (1933) | 31:22 |

***WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

Elizabeth Watts, Soprano 2–4 • Caitlin Hulcup, Mezzo-soprano 3

Joshua Ellicott, Tenor 3 5 • Roderick Williams, Baritone 3

The Bach Choir

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra • David Hill

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The sung texts are included in the booklet, and can also be accessed at www.naxos.com/libretti/573770
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