

"A thousand ages in Thy sight are like an evening gone"

A MASS OF A THOUSAND AGES

PATRICK LARLEY

The premiere of this major new work by Patrick Larley, conducted by the composer, will be given in St. Mary's Parish Church, Nantwich, Cheshire

April 8th 2000 : 7.30pm

Sarah Castle - Mezzo Soprano Richard Strivens - Bass
Nantwich Choral Society Nantwich Youth Choir
Millennium Winds

A MASS OF A THOUSAND AGES

was commissioned by Nantwich Choral Society to celebrate the new Millennium

Over the timeless words of the Latin mass, Patrick Larley has set four specially commissioned poems by Eleanor Cooke, Jonathan Hill, Philip Owens and Jan Purcell, reflecting our thoughts as we meditate on the importance of this unique time: looking back on man's journey through the past age, looking forward to our curatorship of the world in a new age, and through it all, man's search for spirituality in an increasingly materialistic world.

The voices of the Nantwich Youth Choir in this performance symbolise the role that the young generation will play in the crucial years to come.

Cheshire is hosting a unique and historical event
The Mass - completed on 31st January 2000 -
is truly a new work for a new century!
Tickets - £10.00 & £8.00 -
from choir members or phone 01270 625641

This event is kindly supported by Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council, and the Millennium Festival Awards For All

A Mass of a Thousand Ages

Nantwich Choral Society

Nantwich Youth Choir

Millennium Winds

Andrew Mildinhall - Organ

Sarah Castle - mezzo-soprano

Richard Strivens - bass

Composed and conducted by

Patrick Larley

World Première

8th April 2000

St Mary's Church, Nantwich.

A Mass of a Thousand Ages
Patrick Larley

1. KYRIE ELEISON

Lord have Mercy
Christ have mercy
Lord have mercy
Poem: - Jan Purcell

Lord, have mercy

No comfortable words -
Too soon.
Our stockpile of spears and stones;
Of gas and guns, of napalm, and of nails -
Especially of nails -
Needs decommissioning
For the final armistice.

No lightening of our darkness -
Not now.
The Light we had (so freely given)
We squandered on the easy paths to shameful dens.
In pitch of sin we staked our all
For empires vast (and petty) though now we find
Our midden stink too much to bear.

No lifting of our hearts -
Not yet.
The inventory must be entire.
All breakages made good
And paid in full.
Primarily we must sluice and clean
So that our gift, restored, can be revealed.

We cannot go in peace -
Until
These tasks are done.
We will be sullied by our mess and stench
And sickened too. The faults
Most grievously are ours but beaten breasts
Enshrine our beating hearts.

Kyrie Eleison. Christe Eleison.

2. GLORIA

Glory be to God on high
and in earth peace, goodwill to all men.
We praise thee, we worship thee, we glorify thee,
We give thanks to thee for thy great glory ...
Poem: - Philip Owens

Praise Him

At night the ancient light
seeps into this young, still falling world
from the mothering stars,
touches it with pinpricks,
keeps it turning.

It lives,
this monumental moment:
a momentum that seems
conscious of itself,
worshipping.

At dawn the spin
flings up our own star,
illuminator of the sacred touch,
its epiphanies: smoky sky
where someone flew;
ice-numbered oceans for his
chill slumbers; a baby's eye
through which to accuse
and love us still.

Praise Him

3. CREDO

I believe in one God,
the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth ...

4. OFFERTORY PRELUDE (Organ solo)

5. SANCTUS and HOSANNA

Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God of Hosts.
Heaven and earth are full of thy glory ...
Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.
Poem: - Jonathan Hill

First and Second Truths

In the time that follows the first truth we may find a second
The first truth is immediate and compelling

It is a truth of before and after, of no and then yes.
Of ignorance replaced by knowledge
Of asking questions and finding answers
It is the truth of the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

The first truth creates certainty where previously there has been uncertainty.
It is the truth of science, and medicine,
and technology. It is strong and effective.
The first truth can be proved, it is public,
It looks the same to all people at all times.
The crowd demanded it when Jesus was on the cross,
'If you are the Son of God save yourself.'

The second truth does not insist or demand,
It is not immediate nor is it bright.
It is a truth that is not told or formulated.
Rather it is heard as if unintentionally,
Or experienced in the shape of a story,
As in the wanderings and homecomings of Odysseus
The second truth is found often in uncertainty,
Or in the waiting left after the first truth,
Or its fruits, have faltered,
As in the time that follows failed treatment
For a serious illness.
As when Jesus called out from the cross,
'My God my God why have you forsaken me?'

Death and resurrection, dark and light,
Failure and success, hate and love,
Each separately asserts a first truth,
Apprehended together they point to a second,
For some and not for others, and at some times and not at other times.
Sometimes shared, often briefly,
As in the excited shimmer of the baby's body to the sound of her mother's voice.

6. AGNUS DEI

O Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us ...
O Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world,
grant us thy peace.

Poem: - Eleanor Cooke

Agnus Dei

A woman turns
to hold in her eye the way the light tilts
on a window, angle of roof, the door
throwing a shadow.

She is carrying a child in her arms,
bundled up in clothes of many colours.
The baby whimpers, hears
gunfire, the screams of its father, soldiers
shouting in an unfamiliar language.

Every voice carried silence on its tongue,
every night holds in its core the light of day.
Rain, snow, hail, cold,
mud, wire, mines, the tractors breaking down. Planes
swoop low, drop bombs
with someone's name on them - not hers, the child's.
Clouds blot out the sky and lambs -
oh Lamb of God -
eat wormwood from the hillsides,
and the shepherds depart.

From a distance
the gateway promises a beginning.
She stands on the threshold,
wipes her feet on the poisoned grass,
shakes the dust of the journey from her coat.

It is time to
look into the face of the sleeping child,
the child swaddled
against the cold, the brutality of soldiers.

It is time to bend over the child's mouth,
to hold a mirror there,
and read, in the breath of the child she has carried,
the life she has brought through death, the long road's
end and its beginning.

Programme notes by the Composer:

My ideas for the Mass were first conceived in the summer of 1998 whilst on holiday in France, a country whose religious buildings both Gill and I find spiritually inspiring. In September I approached the Chairman of NCS with suggestions for a commission, and the idea became a reality.

I wanted to set the timeless words of the Mass in a contemporary setting, to make them relevant for the unique time of the new Millennium, and to provide a basis for thought as we anticipate the years ahead. To achieve this I asked four poets each to write a poem for a particular place in the Mass: - with the *Kyrie*, (*Lord have mercy upon us*) as we ask forgiveness for the inhumanity man has shown over the past 1000 years or more; with the *Gloria* (*Glory be to God on high*) looking at the grandeur of the world which was created for us; with the *Sanctus* (*Holy holy holy ... heaven and earth are full of thy glory*)

searching for the Holy which is in all of us but with which we so often have lost touch; and with the *Agnus Dei* (*O Lamb of God ... have mercy upon us and grant us thy peace*) committing ourselves to work for a better world for the next millennium with both peace amongst peoples and peace in our hearts. The third movement of the Mass, the *Credo* (*I believe in one God*) is the affirmation of our faith, and stands on its own at the apex of the Mass. Without our belief the rest is pointless, as TS Eliot said in 'The Rock' - *We build in vain unless the Lord build with us.*

As the Mass began to take shape, the stirring words of the great hymn 'O God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come' - and particularly the verse 'A Thousand Ages in Thy sight are like an evening gone' - seemed to infiltrate the inspiration. Thus the title was born, and the theme of the work as a whole.

We ourselves will not see much of the next millennium - we leave it in the hands of the next generations. So it seemed to me that to include the young voices of the Nantwich Youth Choir with the NCS was totally appropriate. These are the minds which we must shape today to bring peace to tomorrow as curators of the 21st century. In the *Sanctus* the children's voices sing the Latin words to playground tunes - underlining both the innocence of children and their uncomplicated and joyful view of a world with which we are often disillusioned. Thomas Traherne, the 17th century mystic poet, writes of the need for man to regain the wonder and simplicity of the child to glory in the world - *at my entrance into the world ... all things were spotless and pure and glorious ... I knew not that there were any sins; all tears and quarrels were hidden from my eyes. Heaven and earth did sing my Creator's praises ...*

The children also have the final word as the Mass closes - *Dona nobis pacem* - (*Grant us thy peace*), as three of them read the words of the hymn -

*A thousand ages in thy sight are like an evening gone,
Short as the watch that ends the night before the rising sun.
Before the hills in order stood, or earth received her frame,
From everlasting thou art God to endless years the same.
O God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home.*

Dona nobis pacem.

Soloists:

Mezzo-Soprano
Sarah Castle

Sarah Castle was born in New Zealand and graduated from Victoria University of Wellington with a B.A & B.Mus. She studied singing as a post-graduate at the Royal Northern College of Music, and while there won the Brigitte Fassbaender Prize for Lieder Interpretation, the Stella Murray Prize in the Royal Over-Seas League Competitions in London, and the Concert FM Prize for Potential as a recording artist in the Mobil Song Quest (N.Z.)

Roles performed include Nicklaus *The Tales of Hoffmann*, Popova *The Bear* by William Walton, Hansel and The Witch *Hansel & Gretel*, Olga *Eugene Onegin*, Orlofsky *Die Fledermaus*, Cherubino *The Marriage of Figaro*. This season she is singing Oberto *Alcina* and Wellgunde *Gotterdammerung* at the Staatsoper Stuttgart.

She has given recitals at St. Martins-in-the-Fields and the Purcell Room, and is a performer on the Live Music Now! scheme. Sarah has recorded with the BBC Philharmonic and made several programmes of songs for Radio New Zealand. In April she appears with the Parisian ensemble La Chapelle Royale in Mendelssohn's *St. Paul*, on a tour of Spain.

Bass
Richard Strivens

Richard Strivens studied at the National Opera Studio, London, and the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester. Recent concerts include Strauss *Deutsche Motette* and *Messiah* - both with the Joyful Company of Singers, Verdi *Requiem*, Purcell *King Arthur*; Bach cantata *Ich have genug*. Richard will be singing *Christus*, *St John Passion* with the Goldberg Ensemble at the Rydale Festival.

Operatic roles include performances at Glyndebourne Festival; the *Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*. Richard is currently singing Maxwell Davies' *The Martyrdom of St Magnus* with the Opera Group and, at the new Royal Opera House Studio Theatre, Mozart's *La finta*.

Conductor
Patrick Larley

Patrick Larley is a freelance conductor, composer and keyboard player. He is founder and director of two professional ensembles - *The Gallery Players* and *Chudleigh's Company*, and also the *Nantwich Youth Choir* which he founded in 1998. He is also Musical Director of Ludlow, Nantwich and Stone Choral Societies, and the Midlands Chorale, and has worked with a number of leading professional orchestras and choirs throughout the country and regularly directs from the harpsichord, recently working with the English Haydn Orchestra in performances of Bach and Handel on period instruments.

Since giving up full-time teaching in 1990, he has concentrated on composition and performance. His recent compositions include *Appearing, Shining, Distant or Near* - the great Egyptian 14th century BC Hymn to Aten - recently recorded on the new CD *Praise for Creation; Stone Circles*, written to celebrate Stone Choral Society's 30th anniversary; *Sinfonia Nativitie* which received its first performance, by Manchester Camerata, at Nantwich, on December 4th 1999, and *This Man of April* which was premièred by the Chantry Quire in Chichester in March 2000.

Under his direction *Chudleigh's Company* has recently recorded *The Rose of Peace*, a CD of his unaccompanied choral music, and *Girl for the Blue* - Advent and Christmas music.

Millennium Winds

Russell Gillespie	Flute	Peter Bateman	Trumpet
Rosemary Hamnett	Oboe	John Yate	Horn
Marie Bateman	Clarinet	Glyn Adams	Trombone
Jonathan Smithers	Bassoon	Floy Hudson	Tuba
Mike Simpson	Trumpet		

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**Future concerts: Saturday June 10th - 'My Spirit sang all day' -
20th century music for unaccompanied choir
25th November 2000 - Gloria by Vivaldi and Dixit Dominus by Handel -
both at 7.30 in St Mary's Church, Nantwich,**

This concert is being recorded. This is a private recording and a limited edition of approximately 200 CDs will be made. The recording is being made for educational purposes and also as a memento of this historic occasion.

The CDs will be sold to society members for a nominal amount to cover the cost of making and producing the discs. It is not anticipated that any profit will ensue. Nantwich Choral Society asks your permission for this recording to be made. We have checked with all the relevant bodies and are confident that the recording will be in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

To assist us, and to enhance the quality of the recording, we respectfully request that any coughs and sneezes are performed '*pianissimo*' rather than '*fortissimo*' and that you allow a momentary pause at the end of each half before applauding.

Please turn off all watches and mobile phones