

A Choral Bucket List

Welcome to Serendipity: the choir's second concert series for 2015, intriguingly entitled "A Choral Bucket List". An odd title for a concert, surely? Maybe not so, for today's program is made up of those pieces we'd like to sing (or indeed, sing again) before we "kick the bucket"! And on that cheerful note, maybe we shall sleep in peace, having ticked a choral setting of Edward Elgar's "Nimrod" from the *Enigma Variations* (here set with the words "requiem aeternam", *grant them eternal rest*) off the list of "must sings". Two other short choral gems were on our "must sing again" list: Maurice Duruflé's stunning setting of "Ubi Caritas", and Samuel Barber's "Sure on this Shining Night". All these works come from the 20th century, and show that, despite the move to more modern compositional styles such as atonal melodies and chance music, writing beautifully haunting choral works remains a compelling need.

It must surely have compelled Mozart when he composed his "Ave verum corpus". Arguably his best known choral work, it too is a gem of real yet understated beauty. More showy, but equally well known, are two movements from Vivaldi's *Gloria*: its energetic opening chorus, and the dance-like "Domine fili", with its clever use of syncopation. Both movements show Vivaldi at his most enthusiastic – we're sure you'll enjoy the bright and bubbly excerpts!

Vivaldi is sometimes forgotten as a contemporary inspiration for Johann Sebastian Bach: Bach used Vivaldi's concertos as a basis for understanding writing for instruments, out of which came works such the Brandenburg Concerti. Bach's most famous orchestral piece would undoubtedly be the Aria from his *Orchestral Suite N° 3* in D major. More commonly known as "Air on the G string", today we present a choral version in a style reminiscent of the Swingle Singers. Aria was itself the inspiration for a pop music hit of the 1960s, "A Whiter Shade of Pale", by Procol Harum – today you can hear both for the price of one! Choral settings of popular music also feature in our bucket list – we have no less than four works that are popular music cult classics. When ABBA won the 1974 Eurovision Song Contest with "Waterloo", little did the world realise how much they would come to dominate the world pop music scene. "Dancing Queen" is one of ABBA's finest, with *Rolling Stone* magazine going so far as to call it "one of the greatest songs of all time". Similar accolades have been awarded to Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody*, a song that was almost not released, but has gone on to be one of the most played songs on commercial radio. What many don't realise is that under its popular music skin lies a work of singularly brilliant composition, deserving a place in any consideration of great music. Likewise, Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven" is a popular music work that transcends the genre. Adaptable to almost any style – a fact proved when it was heard in many guises as part of Andrew Denton's *The Money or the Gun* TV show – this choral version brings Robert Plant and Jimmy Page's haunting lyrics to new audiences... and makes us wonder. And when

speaking of cult classics, none come cultier than “The Time Warp”, from *The Rocky Horror Show*. It may be just a jump to the left, but it was one we had to do again!

The Rocky Horror Show had a new lease of life as a film; music and film have a long association. Although originally written for the musical *Roberta*, “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes” became instantly famous when the musical was adapted for film in an RKO production that featured Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Sung in the film by Irene Dunne, “Smoke” is now a staple of the vast collection *The American Songbook*; this choral arrangement shows why it deserves its place. Much later, music from the film *Sister Act II* featured new takes on both popular and classical music. A medley of songs from the film has become a Serendipity favourite, with its clever integration of “O Happy Day”, the Martha and The Vandella’s hit “Dancing in the Street” and an adaptation of Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy”. It’s guaranteed to make anyone’s day happy!

Serendipity: the choir’s repertoire seldom includes opera, but who can go past Verdi’s “Pilgrim Chorus” (*Va pensiero*) from *Nabucco*? Ranking as one of the greatest opera choruses, its lament for a lost homeland truly touches the heartstrings. Also tugging at the heartstrings is “Bring Him Home” from *Les Misérables*. Normally sung by the lead character Jean Valjean, as a plea to save the life of his young friend Marius, this choral version is no less emotional and we’re sure you’ll be moved by it.

Folksong has not been forgotten in our bucket list, and “The Londonderry Air” is possibly one of the best known. In this arrangement by The King’s Singers tenor Bob Chilcott, the wistful lyrics are complemented by an ethereal piano accompaniment, which combine to create a captivating setting of this text. Serendipity: the choir has, over the years, sung many spiritual arrangements by Andre Thomas, and they have been well received by both the choir and audiences. “Rockin’ Jerusalem”, with its syncopated melody sung by the men, soaring interjections by the ladies and wide dynamic variations, is a technical *tour de force*; we’re delighted to be able to present it again.

If you still need peppering up, maybe a coffee is in order! “Java Jive”, introduced by The Inkspots in 1940, was given a new dimension when recorded by The Manhattan Transfer, a vocal jazz quartet. Today we present this arrangement – we love “the Java jive”, and we are sure you will too. And to remind us that inspiration for coffee comes from all sorts of odd places is “O Fortuna”, the chorus that opens and closes Carl Orff’s *Carmina Burana*. Once used as the soundtrack to an advert for a popular brand of instant coffee (!), “O Fortuna” is the ultimate in bucket list works – a monumental sing, full of great dynamic variation, requiring a great vocal range from all parts and lots of stamina. The enjoyment from singing it is immense, and surely that is why we chose it as one of our signature works for this season!

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A Choral Bucket List Repertoire

Va Pensiero (from 'Nabucco')
Aria
Java Jive
A Whiter Shade of Pale
Requiem Aeternam
Dancing Queen
Gloria
Domine Fili Unigenite
Sure On This Shining Night
Bring Him Home
Oh Happy Day
Ubi Caritas
Smoke Gets In Your Eyes
O Fortuna
Londonderry Air
Rockin' Jerusalem
Stairway to Heaven
Bohemian Rhapsody
Ave Verum Corpus
The Time Warp

Verdi
Bach arr.Astor
Oakland
Brooker Reid & Fisher arr.Swingle/Tillinghurst
Elgar arr.Hill
Andersson & Ulvaeus arr.Funk
Vivaldi
Vivaldi
Barber
Schönberg
Schmutte
Durufle
Kern arr.Blackwell
Orff
trad. arr.Chilcott
Thomas
Page arr. Cleave/RAC
Mercury
Mozart
O'Brien arr.RAC

