

Festive Fare

It's the holiday season – and time for a party - festive fare indeed! For our final concert season for 2013, **Serendipity: the choir** presents music, not just for the Christmas season, but for many festive occasions. Of course, no party is complete without good food and drink, and this has given **Serendipity: the choir** plenty to sing about, courtesy of the modern English composer, John Rutter. Although Rutter is better known for his arrangements of folksongs and Christmas carols, the *Banquet Fugue* does address the festive nature of the season – prepare to gorge yourself on Bach-ian polyphony as we eat, drink and make merry – and what could be better than *Good Ale*!

Festivities often involve singing and dancing and in Africa these seem engrained in the culture. *We Sing and Dance in Africa* is our attempt to re-create this “feel”. The African slave trade, a darker moment in human history, thankfully did not curb the African spirit for singing, and brought us the Negro Spiritual. While strange to think that the misery of slavery might be an occasion for celebration, Negro slaves never lost their vision of better things to come. In today's concert, we present examples of this genre guaranteed to be sung with enthusiasm: *Goin' up to Glory* is a holler song, with a driving rhythm designed to ensure that work didn't flag, while the heart looked to a brighter future; *I'm Gonna Sing* (possibly **Serendipity: the choir's** theme song?), *Great Day* and *Ride the Chariot* (the latter sung by the gentlemen of the choir), all anticipate the imagined freedom to come. You will also hear *Rockin' Jerusalem*, a modern spiritual by Andre Thomas which displays an infectious use of syncopation and both rhythmic and melodic impetus which build to an exciting climax.

From *Rockin' Jerusalem* we move to the world of rock and roll. Celebration abounds in a pastiche of what must be the oddest inclusions, but unarguably a festive piece; *Oh, Happy Day*, famous for its use in the movie *Sister Act*, *Dancing in the Street* (a 1960s pop classic by Martha and the Vandellas) and Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* all in one package! No reference to the 1960s would be complete without a piece from the Liverpool Fab Four, the Beatles, and today we present a sumptuous seven-part arrangement of that psychedelic standard, *Strawberry Fields forever*. Possibly considered an odd inclusion for Festive Fare, but not as strange as you may think, *Strawberry Fields Forever* was written by John Lennon and recalls his childhood playing in the grounds of Strawberry Field (a Salvation Army home), and the annual garden party the home held nearby. Of course, the reference to strawberries makes it a legitimate item in this concert.

Going hand-in-hand with garden parties were local fairs and feasts, and many have been captured in song. One of the most familiar is the folksong *Scarborough Fair*, here arranged for **Serendipity: the choir** by Australian composer, Dan Walker. The references therein to parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme certainly qualify it to be included as “fare” (as well as “fair”). This poignant arrangement hauntingly considers the true nature of love. *Hatikva*, an Israeli folksong, also considers the nature of love, but for one's homeland, in an arrangement that likewise tugs at the heartstrings, tinged with pathos and maybe regret?

Celebrations also include religious festivals and, in this season of Advent, Gabriel's message to the Virgin Mary, the oft-heard *Ave Maria*, is an appropriate addition to today's programme. This version, set for four-part ladies' chorus by the English composer, Michael Head, places this age-old greeting in a thoroughly modern context. Gabriel, and the other angels, Uriel and Raphael, rejoiced at the creation of the heavens. Their celebration is evident in Haydn's *The*

Heavens are Telling, which comes from the oratorio *The Creation*. Often irreverently called "*The Tenors are Yelling*" (we do hope not!), this immense chorus displays the breadth of the firmament in breath-taking choral splendour.

Coronations are festive occasions which have inspired some of the greatest works from composers, and likewise display choral splendor at its greatest. Today's concert has two of the best examples from British coronations. *Zadok the Priest*, one of four choral anthems written by George Frideric Handel, is so stunning that it has become the standard greeting sung for the anointed monarch since for the coronation of George II in 1727. Likewise, Parry's great anthem *I was Glad*, written for Edward VII's coronation in 1902, has become a choral staple (particularly for regal occasions) and was most recently heard at the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge in 2011.

Of course, the Christmas season has not been completely forgotten by **Serendipity: the choir**, and today we present two popular carols of the season. *Es ist ein Ros' Entsprungen*, by Michael Praetorius, is a simple yet stunningly beautiful carol which likens the birth of Jesus to the blossoming of a rose. On a similar botanical theme, the traditional English carol, *The Holly and the Ivy*, uses parts of the holly bush to draw parallels with the message behind Christmas, with "sweet singing in the choir".

Serendipity: the choir hopes you enjoy their sweet singing today and wishes you and yours all the best for the festive season. Be sure to stay in touch, as our 2014 concert programme will bring yet more wonderful choral music that will be sure to delight you!

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Festive Fare Repertoire

Ave Maria	Head
Banquet Fugue	Rutter
Chestnuts Roasting aka A Christmas Song	Torme/Wells arr. Snyder/Higgins
Es ist ein Ros	Praetorius
Goin' Up to Glory	Thomas
Good Ale	Rutter
Great Day	Trad. arr. Kaufmann
Heavens are telling, the	Haydn
Holly and the Ivy, the	Trad. arr. Jacques
Hativka (the Hope)	Trad. arr. Leavitt
I was Glad	Parry
I'm gonna sing 'til the Spirit	Hogan
Oh, Happy day	medley arr. Schmutte
Ride the Chariot	Trad. arr. Smith
Rockin' Jerusalem	Thomas
Scarborough Fair	.arr. Walker
Strawberry Fields Forever	Lennon/McCartney arr. Gray/Clipsham
We Sing and Dance in Africa	Robinson
Zadok the Priest	Handel