

HEAVENLY BODIES CONCERT

The mention of heavenly bodies conjures up many different thoughts to different people, depending on whether one's thoughts are heavenly or earthly minded. Whatever your preference, today's concert by *Serendipity the Choir* is sure to present something that will delight you.

The Evening Star is a heavenly body that has captivated us for centuries. Some "wish upon it" and others write poetry about it. Today we present two musical settings. The first, a world premiere, was written especially for *Serendipity:the choir* by local composer John D'Arcy and uses the text written by William Blake in a composition that echoes Benjamin Britten. The second, a setting for men only, is by Robert Schumann. Both settings, while different, display the beauty in the early night sky that is the Venus. Another modern work is *Stars*, guaranteed to be a unique performance. It features an aleatoric middle section in which choir members present interpretations of "their" stars to create a music depiction of the night sky.

The hymn *Creator of the Stars of Night* by 15th century composer Guillaume Dufay is the oldest work in today's concert. As a work it is historically significant, bridging the gap between Gregorian chant and modern harmony. The harmony, set in consecutive fifths, sounds strange to modern ears but led to the creation of many other beautiful works such as Edvard Grieg's *Ave Maris Stella* (Hail, Star of the Seas), written in the closing years of the 19th century. Both illustrate nicely how song (and particularly sacred song) has developed over 400 years.

As Christmas approaches, it would be remiss not to include some appropriate seasonal music. *The Three Kings* by Peter Cornelius cleverly combines the Lutheran chorale *How Brightly Shines the Morning Star* with a melody for a solo singer. It tells the story of the journey of the Magi and features a climax of supernova-like beauty. *Angels and Shepherds*, a work for women's voices by Hungarian composer Zoltan Kodaly, tells the story of the announcement of Christ's birth on that first Christmas night and is a beautiful arrangement by a composer for whom the voice was a prized instrument.

The heavens were inspiration for more modern works. *I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise*, by George Gershwin was written for George White's "Scandals of 1922" and has become a firm favourite, with Georges Guetary's version from "An American in Paris", an unforgettable rendition. Hopefully you will find our version similarly memorable. From "Hair" comes *Aquarius*, a song which draws on astrological themes to transport us back to the 1960s and its mantra of peace and love. Made famous in the movie musical "Fame!", *I Sing the Body Electric* draws on the inspiration of the heavens to create that "star quality". Though not from a musical, *Fly Me to the Moon* completes this quartet, and will forever remain the first record played on the moon to "go platinum"!

Bridging the heavenly and the earthly is the 17th century madrigal *Hence Stars* by Michael East. In it the glory of the sun and stars is compared to the glory of "Oriana", England's Queen Elizabeth I. One of 21 madrigals by leading composers of the day, it concludes with "Then sang the shepherds and nymphs of Diana" in Elizabeth's praise, a conclusion common to all madrigals in the collection. It contrasts with

Deshi, the Indian answer to *The Girl from Ipanema*, a raga in which voices replace the hypnotic sounds of sitar and tabla. Also using voices to replace instruments is *He Was Beautiful*, a song made famous by Cleo Laine, singer and lyricist. This beautiful arrangement perfectly captures the song's wistful quality.

No *Serendipity*: the choir concert would be complete without songs exploring the lighter side and today we present two for your enjoyment. *The Computer Song* tells of the consequences when a computer can get too "personal" while *The Physician* tells of what may happen (WARNING: dreadful pun approaching!) when a heavenly body is "organ-ised".

Finally, we present two songs of far-from heavenly bodies. *Dry Bones* tells of Ezekiel's attempt (with Divine help) to recreate bodies from their skeletons, while *Il Est Bel et Bon* tells the story of a flirtatious wife cuckolding her husband to the accompaniment of the farmyard.

CONCERT REPERTOIRE

Dufay	Hymnus: Creator of the Stars of Night
Howard arr.Arch/Clipsham	Fly Me to the Moon
East	Hence Stars, Too Dim of Light
Laine arr.Myers/Fowles	Cavatina: He Was Beautiful
Grieg	Ave Maris Stella
Porter arr.Clipsham	The Physician
D'Arcy	To the Evening Star
Schumann	To the Evening Star
MacDermott/Ellington arr.Arch/Clipsham	Aquarius/Beginning to See the Light
Spiritual arr.Hayes	Dry Bones
Passereau	Il Est Bel et Bon
Cornelius arr.Atkins soloist: Kerith Fowles	The Three Kings
Kuzmenko arr.Clipsham	Stars
Gershwin arr.Brymer	I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise
Williams	The Computer Song (an automated romance)
Kodaly	The Angels and the Shepherds
Pierce arr.Clipsham	Deshi (an Indian raga)
Gore arr.Lojeski/Clipsham	I Sing the Body Electric
Adams	Stars, Songs and Faces