



Director: Sam Laughton

Sergei Rachmaninoff All-Night Vigil



**with Herbert Howells
Three Psalm Preludes (Set One)
Organist: Ben Driver**

**Holy Trinity Sloane Square
London SW1**

7.30 pm, Saturday 7 February 2015

The mystery always remains; it is deepened by our knowledge. Knowledge destroys only false mysteries created by our own ignorance, but there are other mysteries which confront us when we reach the depth of knowledge. God is a mystery, and the knowledge of God is communicated in mystery ... Rational theology is false theology, for it denies the mystery that surrounds God.

(Nicholas Berdyaev)

Orthodoxy is first of all the love of beauty. Our entire life must be inspired by the vision of heavenly glory, and this contemplation is the essence of Orthodoxy ...

(S.N. Bulgakov)

Neither Sergei Rachmaninoff nor Herbert Howells took an active part in the First World War: in 1914 Rachmaninoff was 41, and Howells, though only 22, was prevented by serious illness from joining his friend Ivor Gurney in uniform. For his part, Rachmaninoff, now at the zenith of his career as a composer, devoted much of his activity to raising money for the War Relief fund and other charitable causes. And it was at a War Charity concert given by the Moscow Synodical Choir in March 1915 that his recently composed *All-Night Vigil* was first performed.

Although he possessed a unquestioning religious faith throughout his life, Rachmaninoff was unfamiliar with the intricacies of the Orthodox liturgy. Although he had considerable experience of attending church and soaking up the atmosphere (in particular the chants and the bells), it would have been far from obvious what was actually being sung and read. Apart from anything else, the Orthodox church continued to use the archaic language of Church Slavonic, full of arcane grammatical constructions and obsolete words, which modern Russian speakers would have great difficulty in following.

Rachmaninoff did however have a great love of the chants of his native church, many of which form the backbone of many of the pieces making up the *Vigil*. For the rest, his own newly composed melodies are almost indistinguishable from real chants: the composer referred to them as 'a conscious counterfeit of the ritual'. And their most striking features (long mellifluous winding lines, moving mostly by step) are shared with many of Rachmaninoff's most famous melodies in his orchestral works. Indeed one such melody (heard towards the end of the 'Resurrectional Troparion') reappeared at the end of the composer's life in his *Symphonic Dances*.

As with so many great choral works, Rachmaninoff has set to music only small parts of the overall *Vigil* service. The texts are designed to be embedded within a much longer series of chanted prayers and litanies. So it is appropriate to perform the music in such a way as to provide occasional relief from the continuous unaccompanied choral sound, rather than simply singing all fifteen movements from beginning to end. And although instrumental music is prohibited in the Russian church, Rachmaninoff himself broke so many liturgical rules in his manner of composing that his *Vigil* is unlikely ever to have been suitable for liturgical use in a church context. It therefore seems entirely appropriate to incorporate into tonight's performance other music, on the face of it extraneous, but in fact extraordinarily apt.

It was in the same year as Rachmaninoff completed his music for the *All-Night Vigil* in Moscow, that Herbert Howells (still a student at the Royal College of Music in London) was beginning to write his first set of *Psalms Preludes* for organ. Composed between 1915 and 1916, these are effectively miniature tone-poems based on the selected verses from the psalms. As with Rachmaninoff, his music is imbued with the stepwise plainchant that Howells grew to know and love from his early association with the recently built Westminster Cathedral. And it is partly for that reason that these pieces fit so snugly into the flow of Rachmaninoff's work. Indeed the extraordinary fact is that one can detect echoes of each composer's music in the other. The three organ pieces happily fall into the most appropriate keys at the appropriate time for a break from the *Vigil*. And since the majority of the texts of the *Vigil* itself (including those not set by Rachmaninoff) are derived from the Psalms, the Howells works provide an appropriate textual as well as musical consanguinity.

The form of *Vigil* set by Rachmaninoff is that regularly sung on a Saturday evening: the so-called 'Resurrectional Vigil'. It really consists of two services: Vespers and Matins. While the Vespers service focuses on the themes of Creation and the coming of Christ, Matins is concerned with the Resurrection. This setting of the *All-Night Vigil* is not only the crowning glory of the golden age of Russian Orthodox choral music, but was Rachmaninoff's favourite of all his works. Indeed he requested that the 'Song of St Simeon' be performed at his funeral, with its haunting words 'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace'.

Sam Laughton

The liturgy begins with the

Exclamations

(The Deacon sung by Andrew Daws, and the Priest by John Hayward)

(Deacon)

Bless Master.

(Priest)

Glory to the Holy, Consubstantial, Life-Creating, and undivided Trinity, now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

(Choir) *Amen.*

And to bring the faithful in from the realm of the secular and worldly chaos to the peace and order of the spiritual domain, the choir launches immediately into the

Call to Worship

(Words from Psalm 95)

Come, let us worship God, our King.

Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ, our King and our God.

Come, let us worship and fall down before the very Christ, our King and our God.

Come, let us worship and fall down before Him.

To begin the service of Vespers proper, the choir responds to the alto soloist chanting the

Introductory Psalm

(Words from Psalm 104. Alto solo by Geraldine Mynors)

(Solo)

Bless the Lord, O my soul..

O Lord my God, Thou art very great.

Thou art clothed with honour and majesty.

The waters stand upon the mountains.

The waters flow between the hills.

In wisdom hast Thou made all things.

(Choir)

Blessed art Thou, O Lord.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord.

Marvellous are Thy works, O Lord.

Marvellous are Thy works, O Lord.

Glory to Thee, O Lord, who hast created all!

The 'Kathismata' (a series of psalms read while the congregation is literally 'sitting down') now begin, starting with the

First Antiphon of the First Kathisma

(Words from Psalms 1, 2 & 3)

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked.

For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,

but the way of the wicked will perish.

Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice in Him with trembling.

Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.

Arise, O Lord! Save me, O my God!

Salvation is of the Lord: and Thy blessing is upon Thy people.

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
both now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.*

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, glory to Thee, O God! (3 times)

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

In the actual service, there would now follow the words 'Lord, I have cried unto Thee, hearken unto me.' In lieu of this, we hear, in the D minor key of the previous antiphon, a very apt evocation of a similar text, Herbert Howells'

Psalm Prelude No.1

(On words from Psalm 34)

This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.

As we imagine the lighting of the lamp at sunset, the choir returns with the ancient

Evening Hymn

(Words 3rd century. Tenor solo by Nick Richmond-Smith)

*Gladsome Light of the holy glory of the Immortal One –
the Heavenly father, holy and blessed – O Jesus Christ!
Now that we have come to the setting of the sun, and behold the light of evening,
we praise the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – God.
Thou art worthy at every moment to be praised in hymns by reverent voices.
O Son of God, thou art the Giver of Life; therefore all the world glorifies Thee.*

As the evening light dims, so the now key drops from C minor to B flat minor. The scene shifts to the scene of the elder Simeon in the Temple, recognising the infant Jesus as the Messiah. Still focussing on the metaphorical power of light, but with the additional image of a lullaby for the young baby, the choir sings what we recognise as the Nunc Dimittis, or

Song of St.Simeon

(Words from Luke Ch.2. Tenor solo by Stephen Cviic)

Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people – a light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel.

For the final part of the Vespers liturgy, the choir sings of the annunciation by Angel Gabriel to Mary ('Theokotos' meaning 'the one who gave birth to God') in the words of the

Troparion

*Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos, Mary full of grace, the Lord is with Thee.
Blessed art Thou among women, and blessed is the Fruit of Thy womb, for Thou hast borne the Saviour of our souls.*

Again the key drops by a tone, as Matins begins with the bell-like images of the

Verses before the Six Psalms (or Lesser Doxology)

(Words from Luke Ch.2 & Psalm 51)

*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among men. (3 times)
O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim Thy praise.*

In place of the ordained reading of the Six Psalms, we remain in the key of E flat with Howells'

Psalm Prelude No.2

(On words from Psalm 37)

But the meek shall inherit the earth: and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

As we imagine the church growing lighter, and the clergy processing in full vestments to the centre of the church, the choir proclaim the

Polyeleos

(Words from Psalms 135 & 136)

*Praise the name of the Lord. Alleluia.
Praise the Lord, O you His servants. Alleluia, alleluia.
Blessed be the Lord from Zion, He who dwells in Jerusalem. Alleluia.
O give thanks unto the Lord for He is good. Alleluia, alleluia.
For his mercy endures forever. Alleluia.
O give thanks unto the God of Heaven. Alleluia, alleluia.
For his mercy endures forever. Alleluia.*

The stage is now set for the dramatic events of Christ's Resurrection, which between repetitions of a pious refrain, unfold in a colourful series of verses, known as the

Resurrectional Troparion

Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes.

The angelic host was filled with awe when it saw Thee among the dead. By destroying the power of death, O Saviour, Thou didst raise Adam and save all men from hell!

Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes.

"Why do you mingle myrrh with your tears of compassion, O ye women disciples?" cried the radiant angel in the tomb to the myrrh-bearers. "Behold the tomb and understand: The Saviour is risen from the dead!"

Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes.

Very early in the morning, the myrrh-bearers ran with sorrow to Thy tomb, but an angel came to them and said: "The time for sorrow has come to an end! Do not weep, but announce the resurrection to the apostles!"

Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes.

The myrrh-bearers were sorrowful as they neared Thy tomb, but the angel said unto them: "Why do you number the living among the dead? Since He is God, He is risen from the tomb!"

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

We worship the Father and His Son and the Holy Spirit: the Holy Trinity, one in essence!

We cry with the Seraphim: "Holy, Holy, Holy art Thou, O Lord!"

Both now and ever, and unto ages of ages, Amen.

Since Thou didst give birth to the Giver of Life, O Virgin, Thou didst deliver Adam from his sin!

Thou gavest joy to Eve instead of sadness!

The God-man who was born of Thee has restored to life those who had fallen from it!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, glory to Thee, O God! (3 times)

***** INTERVAL OF 20 MINUTES *****

We are to assume that the Gospel appointed for the day has now been read. In words that had particular resonance in the midst the bloodshed of the First World War, the choir reflect on what has been heard, in the

Response to the Gospel

Having beheld the resurrection of Christ, let us worship the holy Lord Jesus, the only Sinless One.

We venerate Thy cross, O Christ, and we hymn and glorify Thy holy resurrection, for Thou art our God, and we know no other than Thee; we call on Thy name.

Come, all you faithful, let us venerate Christ's holy resurrection.

For behold, through the cross joy has come into all the world.

Ever blessing the Lord, let us praise His resurrection, for by enduring the cross for us, He has destroyed death by death.

Then, interspersed with an angelic refrain from the semi-chorus, the choir (led by the lowest basses) express the familiar words of the

Magnificat

(Words from Luke Ch.1)

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.

(Refrain)

More honourable than the Cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim, without defilement Thou gavest birth to God the Word, true Theotokos, we magnify Thee.

For He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.

(Refrain)

For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name, and His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation.

(Refrain)

He has put down the mighty from their thrones and has exalted those of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent empty away.

(Refrain)

He has helped His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity forever.

(Refrain)

The climax of Matins is now reached with the greatest hymn of the entire service, encompassing themes of glorification, thanksgiving, repentance and supplication:

The Great Doxology

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory.

O Lord, Heavenly King, God the Father almighty.

O Lord, the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, who takest away the sin of the world, receive our prayer.

Thou who sittest at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us.

For Thou alone art holy, Thou alone art the Lord Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Every day I will bless Thee and praise Thy name forever and ever.

Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord, God of our fathers, and praised and glorified is Thy name forever. Amen.

Let thy mercy be upon us, O Lord, as we have set our hope on Thee.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes. (3 times)

Lord, Thou hast been our refuge from generation to generation.

I said: Lord have mercy on me, heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee.

Lord, I flee to Thee, teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God; for with Thee is the fountain of life, and in Thy light we shall see light.

Continue Thy mercy on those who know Thee.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us. (3 times)

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, both now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Holy Immortal, have mercy on us.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us.

Rachmaninoff's imagery of bells in the Great Doxology, and the choir's final chord of C minor, are immediately picked up by the solemn bell-like pulse of the organ pedals, at the start of Howells'

Psalm Prelude No.3

(On words from Psalm 23)

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:
for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

The organ has modulated from C minor to C major, a perfect transition for the related A minor start to the reflective

Troparion

*Today salvation has come to the world.
Let us sing to Him who rose from the dead, the Author of our life.
Having destroyed death by death, He has given us the victory and great mercy.*

Unconventionally, Rachmaninoff also set the following alternative text, to similar but more expansive effect, another

Troparion

*Thou didst rise from the tomb and burst the bonds of Hades!
Thou didst destroy the condemnation of death, O Lord, releasing all mankind from the snares of the enemy!
Thou didst show Thyself to Thine apostles, and didst send them forth to proclaim Thee, and through them Thou hast granted Thy peace to the world, O Thou who art plenteous in mercy!*

Finally, and again unconventionally, Rachmaninoff eschewed the traditionally simple close to the service, preferring instead to let the choir exclaim in triumph the

Kontakion to the Mother of God

*To Thee, the victorious Leader of Triumphant hosts, we Thy servants,
delivered from evil, offer hymns of thanksgiving.
O Theotokos! Since Thou dost possess invincible might,
set us free from all calamities, so that we may cry to Thee:
“Rejoice, O unwedded Bride!”*

THE ELYSIAN SINGERS

SOPRANOS

Jessica Buchanan-Barrow
Harriet Gritton
Helly Seeley
Anne Taylor
Ellen Parkes
Jessica Lichtenstein
Sara Kalic
Soo-Lin Lui
Alice Ruffle
Shinong Song
Anna Ferguson Rhodes
Helen Dickinson
Sandy Jones

ALTOS

Geraldine Mynors
Kate Tuckett
Charly Oakley
Francesca Trundle
Heather Devine
Anne Webster
Kate Tidball

TENORS

Stephen Cviic
Antoine Sazio
Richard Warren
Nick Richmond-Smith
Julian Woodward
John Hayward

BASSES

Naveen Rajendran
Michael Chambers
Ben Driver
Jon Snow
Dingeman Wolfert
Andrew Daws
Christopher Whitehouse
Dan Rollison
David Benedict
Alexander Greaves

Sam Laughton

Sam Laughton was organ scholar of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, where he read music. He now juggles busy careers as a barrister and musician. He is musical director of the Elysian Singers, Craswall Players, Chiltern Camerata and Trinity Camerata, and Director of the Speen Festival. Sam is devoted to conducting and organising the music camps at Pigotts, and is a trustee of two musical charities. He has guest-conducted many orchestras including Oxford Sinfonia, Kensington Chamber Orchestra, Kew Sinfonia, Orchestra of the City and Crendon Chamber Orchestra. And as a keyboard-player he has worked with Oxford Philomusica, the Joyful Company of Singers, ENO Baylis and Garsington Opera.

Ben Driver

Ben Driver is organist and choirmaster at St Peter's church in Petersham, Surrey. He was organ scholar at Oriol College, Oxford, having sung as a chorister at St Margaret's Westminster under Richard Hickox. He subsequently directed the Cherwell Singers in Oxford, where as Assistant Organist at the University Church he worked with Geoffrey Webber and David Trendell, and was a founder member of the Finzi Singers. As conductor, singer, accompanist and producer, Ben has performed with a wide range of groups, including Millennium Novum, Richmond Voices, 2x2 Opera, the Petersham Consort and the Elysian Singers of London.

The Elysian Singers

The Elysian Singers of London, under musical director Sam Laughton, is one of the UK's leading chamber choirs. Known for its adventurous programming and imaginative repertoire, the choir gives concerts both in and outside London, and has recorded widely acclaimed CDs. The Elysians pride themselves on maintaining consistently high performance standards, but a friendly and relaxed atmosphere is also regarded as essential for attracting and keeping good singers. After the choir was founded in 1986 by Matthew Greenall, the group quickly developed a special interest in contemporary music, and has given the world premières of works by John Woolrich, Howard Skempton, Sir John Tavener, John Habron and Paul Stanhope. Matthew was succeeded as music director by Sam Laughton in 2000. The choir regularly performs at venues such as St. Martin-in-the-Fields and St John's Smith Square, and sings with guest conductors, including Jeremy Summerly. It has also participated in festivals around the country, including Spitalfields Festival, Corsham Festival, London Festival of Contemporary Church Music, Malcolm Arnold Festival, York Late Music and English Music Festival. The choir's CD of music by James MacMillan – 'Cantos Sagrados' – received a 5-star rating from BBC Music Magazine. Reviewing 'Songs of the Isles', the choir's 2009 Bantock release, the same publication spoke of the Elysians' 'young, fresh-toned voices, brightly attentive to text without becoming over-punctilious'. There have been several radio and television broadcasts, including the first broadcast performances of Henryk Górecki's 'Miserere' and 'Three Lullabies' on BBC Radio 3, the finals of the Sainsbury's Choir of the Year competition at the Albert Hall, and BBC2's Lesley Garrett Easter Special. Twice in 2011, the choir performed live on Radio 3's 'In Tune', first introducing the première of its latest commission, 'Timepieces' by Ian Stephens, and later the choir's CD, 'The Spirit of Christmas Present', released on Meridian. The choir performed at the Royal Festival Hall in March 2014 as part of a Gala Concert to celebrate the restoration of the organ, performing a specially commissioned work by Sir John Tavener, 'Monument to Beethoven'. The choir's latest CD, 'Timepieces', is now available, featuring works that were given their première performances by the Elysian Singers.

Thanks to the choir's friends and benefactors, including Mr & Mrs P Mynors and Mrs C Cviic.



Forthcoming concerts by the Elysian Singers

Miserere: Music by candlelight for Lent and Passiontide

Music by Byrd, Tallis, Sheppard, Bertie Baigent, Mendelssohn, Allegri, Brahms, Gesualdo, Lotti & James MacMillan
17 March 2015 at 7.30 pm, St Martin-in-the Fields, Trafalgar Square, London

The House of the Mind: A celebration of 20th century English choral music

Music by Howells, Finzi, Naylor, Bantock, Harris and Walton
23 May 2015 at 7.00 pm, English Music Festival, Dorchester Abbey, Oxfordshire

Dixit Dominus

Handel: Dixit Dominus & J.S. Bach: Mass in G minor
4 July 2015 at 7.30 pm, Dore Abbey, Abbeydore, Herefordshire
9 July 2015 at 7.30 pm, St James Piccadilly, London

If you would like to join the Elysian Singers' mailing list, please write to
Richard Warren, 20 Downs Road, Beckenham BR3 5JY or email mailinglist@elysiansingers.com.

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