



President – Patricia Parkes

Conductor – Michael Cayton

Highlights from Mendelssohn's Elijah

Saturday 19 March 2022

St Mary's Church,

Rickmansworth



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Welcome from the Chair



We are very pleased to be performing Elijah tonight. This has been planned for quite a while through various lockdowns. We have had some chilly times rehearsing this term with doors and windows of the church hall open to the evening air. I hope the neighbours have enjoyed the sound of our rehearsals.

In the summer, please join us for an evening of jazz on Saturday 2nd July. The other date to note, should you wish to come and sing with us, is our Bring and Sing workshop on Saturday 22nd October - more details to follow.

Thank you for joining us this evening and I hope you enjoy the concert; we appreciate your support.

Lyndsay Ward
Chair

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Programme

Highlights from Mendelssohn's Elijah

Introduction

Elijah

As God the Lord of Israel liveth, before whom I stand; there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.

Chorus: *Help Lord*

Help, Lord! Wilt Thou quite destroy us?

The harvest now is over, the summer days are gone, and yet no power cometh to help us.

Will then the Lord be no more God in Zion?

The deeps afford no water; and the rivers are exhausted!

The suckling's tongue now cleaveth for thirst to his mouth; the infant children ask for bread; and there is no one breaketh it to feed them.

Chorus: *Blessed are the men who fear him*

The People

Blessed are the men who fear Him, they ever walk in the ways of peace.

Through darkness riseth light, light to the upright.

He is gracious, compassionate; He is righteous.

Recitative: *Call first upon your God*

Elijah

Call first upon your God, your numbers are many; I, even I only, remain one prophet of the Lord.

Invoke your forest gods, and mountain deities.

Chorus: *Baal we cry to thee*

Prophets of Baal

Baal, we cry to thee, hear and answer us!

Heed the sacrifice we offer!

Hear us, Baal! Hear, mighty god! Baal, oh answer us!

Baal, let thy flames fall and extirpate the foe!

Recitative and Chorus: *Call him louder/Hear our cry, O Baal*

Elijah

Call him louder! for he is a god.

He talketh, or, he is pursuing; or, he is in a journey; or, per-adventure, he sleepeth:
so awaken him.
Call him louder, call him louder!

Prophets of Baal

Hear our cry, O Baal, now arise! Wherefore slumber?

Recitative and Chorus: *Call him louder/ Hear and answer!*

Elijah

Call him louder! He heareth not. With knives and lancets cut yourselves after your manner; leap upon the altar ye have made; call him and prophesy; not a voice will answer you, none will listen, none heed you.

Prophets of Baal

Baal! Hear and answer, Baal!

Mark how the scorner derideth us!

Recitative and Aria: *Lord God of Abraham*

Elijah

Draw near, all ye people, come to me!

Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel; this day let it be known that Thou art God, and that I am Thy servant!

Lord God of Abraham! Oh show to all this people that I have done these things according to Thy word!

Oh hear me, Lord, and answer me!

Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, oh hear me and answer me; and show this people that Thou art Lord God; and let their hearts again be turned!

Chorus: *Cast thy burden upon the Lord*

Angels

Cast thy burden upon the Lord; and He shall sustain thee;

He never will suffer the righteous to fall; He is at thy right hand.

Thy mercy, Lord, is great, and far above the heavens.

Let none be made ashamed, that wait upon Thee!

Recitative and Chorus: *O Thou, who makest thine Angels, Spirits*

Elijah

O Thou, who makest Thine Angels, Spirits;

Thou, whose ministers are flaming fires; let them now descend!

The People

The fire descends from heaven! The flames consume his offering! Before Him, upon your faces fall!

The Lord is God, the Lord is God! O Israel, hear! Our God is one Lord: and we will have no other gods before the Lord.

Elijah

Take all the prophets of Baal, and let not one of them escape you. Bring them down to Kishon's brook; and there let them be slain.

The People

Take all the prophets of Baal, and let not one of them escape us: bring all, and slay them!

Aria: Is not His word like a fire?

Elijah

Is not His word like a fire? and like a hammer that breaketh the rock into pieces?
For God is angry with the wicked every day; and if the wicked turn not, the Lord will whet His sword; and He hath bent His bow, and made it ready.

Chorus: Thanks be to God

The People

Thanks be to God! He quencheth the thirsty land.
The waters gather, they rush along! they are lifting their voices!
The stormy billows are high, their fury is mighty.
But the Lord is above them, and Almighty.

– Short Pause –

Chorus: Be not afraid

Be not afraid, saith God the Lord.
Be not afraid; thy help is near.
God, the Lord thy God, sayeth unto thee, 'Be not afraid!'
Though thousands languish and fall beside thee, and tens of thousands around thee perish, yet still it shall not come nigh thee.

Recitative: The Lord hath exalted thee

Elijah

The Lord hath exalted thee from among the people, and o'er His people Israel hath made thee King.
But thou, Ahab, hast done evil to provoke Him to anger above all that were before thee; as if it had been a light thing for thee to walk in the sins of Jeroboam.

Thou hast made a grove and an altar to Baal, and serv'd him and worshipp'd him.
Thou hast killed the righteous, and also taken possession.
And the Lord shall smite all Israel as a reed is shaken on the water; and He shall give Israel up, and thou shalt know He is the Lord.

Aria: *It is enough*

Elijah

It is enough, O Lord, now take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers!
I desire to live no longer: now let me die, for my days are but vanity.
I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts, for the children of Israel have broken Thy covenant, and thrown down Thine altars, and slain all Thy prophets, slain them with the sword.
And I, even I only am left; and they seek my life to take it away!
It is enough! O Lord, now take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers!
Now let me die, Lord, take away my life!

Recitative *See now he sleepeth*

See, now he sleepeth beneath a juniper tree in the wilderness! And there the angels of the Lord encamp round about all them that fear Him.

Sopranos & Altos: *Lift Thine Eyes*

The Angels

O lift thine eyes to the mountains, whence cometh help.
Thy help cometh from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.
He hath said, thy foot shall not be moved.
Thy Keeper will never slumber.

Chorus: *He watching over Israel*

He, watching over Israel, slumbers not, nor sleeps.
Shouldst thou, walking in grief, languish; He will quicken thee.

Recitative: *Night falleth round me*

Elijah

Night falleth round me, O Lord! Be Thou not far from me!
Hide not Thy face, O Lord, from me; my soul is thirsting for Thee, as a thirsty land.

The Angel

Arise now! get thee without, stand on the mount before the Lord: for there His glory will appear, and shine on thee! Thy face must be veiled, for He draweth near.

Chorus: *Behold, God the Lord passed by!*

Behold, God the Lord passed by!

And a mighty wind rent the mountains around, brake in pieces the rocks, brake them before the Lord.

But yet the Lord was not in the tempest.

Behold, God the Lord passed by!

And the sea was upheaved, and the earth was shaken.

But yet the Lord was not in the earthquake.

And after the earthquake there came a fire.

But yet the Lord was not in the fire.

And after the fire there came a still small voice: and in that still voice onward came the Lord.

Aria: *For the mountains shall depart*

Elijah

For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but Thy kindness shall not depart from me; neither shall the covenant of Thy peace be removed.

Chorus: *Then did Elijah*

Then did Elijah the prophet break forth like a fire; his words appeared like burning torches.

Mighty kings by him were overthrown.

He stood on the mount of Sinai, and heard the judgments of the future, and in Horeb, its vengeance.

And when the Lord would take him away to heaven, lo! there came a fiery chariot, with fiery horses; and he went by a whirlwind to heaven.

Chorus: *O come everyone that thirsteth*

O come everyone that thirsteth,

O come to the waters,

O come ye unto Him,

O hear, and your souls shall live for ever.

Chorus: *And then shall your light break forth*

And then, then shall your light break forth as the light of morning breaketh, and your health shall speedily spring forth then; and the glory of the Lord ever shall reward you.

Lord, our Creator, how excellent Thy Name is in all the nations! Thou fillest heaven with Thy glory.

Amen.

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Programme Notes

Elijah - Felix Mendelssohn (1809 - 1847)

Mendelssohn was born into a wealthy and cultured Berlin family. He was a precociously gifted child, so much so that the finest musicians of the day hailed him as a second Mozart. This comparison was by no means without foundation; by the time he had reached his mid-teens Mendelssohn had composed a large number of mature works, including twelve string symphonies and his first symphony for full orchestra, written when he was only fifteen. He was sixteen when he wrote the *String Octet*, and the wonderful overture *A Midsummer Night's Dream* followed a year later. Mendelssohn's extraordinary gifts were not confined to composition; he went on to become a brilliant pianist and organist, a fine string player and an inspirational conductor. He was also a very good artist and was widely read.

Yet another dimension to Mendelssohn's glittering career was his far-reaching influence as an organiser and administrator. As a result of his tireless efforts with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and the Leipzig Conservatory, which he founded in 1843, he raised performance standards to new heights and created many opportunities for contemporary composers and performers. He made a major contribution to the revival of interest in Bach's music, which at that time was virtually unknown to the general public. In 1829, when he was still only twenty, he conducted the first public performance of the *St. Matthew Passion* since Bach's death, an event which, probably more than any other, provided the impetus for the 19th century rediscovery of Bach. He was also a great admirer of the music of Handel and Haydn, whose oratorios he conducted in Leipzig. Mendelssohn visited England many times, where he was received with adulation, feted by the press, and became a great favourite of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.

No sooner had Mendelssohn's first oratorio, *St. Paul*, received its premiere at the Lower Rhine Festival in 1836, than he began thinking about a suitable subject for a new oratorio. The idea of one based on the life of the Old Testament prophet, Elijah, particularly appealed to him. In 1836 he wrote to his friend and librettist Carl Klingemann, '*If you would only give all the care and thought you bestowed upon St. Paul to an Elijah or a St. Peter or even an Og of Bashan!*' Unfortunately no suitable libretto was forthcoming, not even an *Og of Bashan*, and with the ever-pressing demands of his other work he regretfully put the idea to one side. It was to be another ten years before it came to fruition.

The subject of *Elijah* remained dear to his heart, however, so in 1838 he enlisted the help of his old friend, Pastor Julius Schubring, in drafting a libretto. Mendelssohn had

very definite ideas about this. He wrote to Schubring, '*...the dramatic element should predominate. The personages should act and speak as if they were living beings.*' Schubring disagreed. He clearly felt that the oratorio should be in the nature of a sermon in music, stressing the moral and uplifting aspects of the Old Testament texts, and that any degree of dramatic realism was inappropriate in a sacred work. As a result of these disagreements the project was once more dropped.

Then in 1845 the Birmingham Festival committee wrote to Mendelssohn, asking him if he would write a new oratorio for the following year's Festival. Mendelssohn had attended previous Festivals in 1837, when he had conducted *St. Paul*, and in 1840, when the *Hymn of Praise* had been performed. On both occasions he had enjoyed great success. He wrote back accepting the new commission, adding, '*Since some time I have begun an oratorio and hope I shall be able to bring it out for the first time at your Festival; but it is still a mere beginning and I cannot yet give you any promise as to my finishing it in time.*' He returned to *Elijah* with renewed enthusiasm, mostly compiling the libretto himself this time, though he still required Schubring's assistance in selecting suitable texts. He worked feverishly on the score to ensure that it was completed according to schedule.

The first performance, conducted by Mendelssohn himself, took place on the 26 August 1846 before an audience of two thousand who had packed into Birmingham Town Hall for the eagerly-awaited event. It was an unprecedented success. No less than four choruses and four arias were encored, and the applause evidently bordered on the hysterical. Mendelssohn recounted the experience in a letter to his brother. '*No work of mine went so admirably the first time of execution, or was received with such enthusiasm by both the musicians and the audience,*' he wrote. The Times' music correspondent was even more effusive. '*The last note of Elijah was drowned in a long-continued unanimous volley of plaudits, vociferous, and deafening,*' he reported. '*Mendelssohn..... descended from his position on the conductor's rostrum; but he was compelled to appear again, amidst renewed cheers and huzzas. Never was there a more complete triumph; never a more thorough and speedy recognition of a great work of art.*' It was without doubt the crowning glory of Mendelssohn's spectacularly successful career, but tragically it was to prove his last major triumph. A lifetime of overwork now brought rapidly failing health, and when his beloved sister Fanny unexpectedly died, he never recovered from the shock. He died on 4 November 1847.

Ever since Handel's *Messiah* had first captivated audiences in 1743, the oratorio form had occupied a pre-eminent position in the concert halls of England. After its resounding first performance, *Elijah* immediately established itself as second only to *Messiah* in the public's affections. It received countless performances in the years just after its composition and this enormous popularity continued scarcely unabated

throughout the nineteenth century and beyond. Some measure of this may be judged by the fact that it was performed at the Three Choirs Festival every year from 1847 to 1930.

During the austere post-war period there was a considerable reaction against Mendelssohn's music. To what extent this was an after-effect of the rampant German anti-Semitism of the 1930s and 40s is difficult to determine, but the generally held view, particularly in some sections of the musical establishment, was that his life had been too easy and too comfortable, and that as a consequence his music, with its classical elegance and understated emotion, was superficial and distinctly inferior. In addition, the oratorio as a musical experience was by now less popular with audiences. Because of these changes in the musical climate, and also because of its previous over-exposure, *Elijah* almost disappeared from the repertoire of a great many choral societies. Thankfully, in recent years there has been a more balanced attitude to Mendelssohn, avoiding both the excessive adulation which surrounded him during his lifetime and the equally absurd denigration of more recent times.

Structurally the work is clearly influenced by the choral masterpieces of Bach and Handel, but its highly dramatic style, at times bordering on the operatic, constitutes a significant step forward from its Baroque predecessors. *Elijah* has many other outstanding qualities: the imaginative orchestration, the spontaneity and energy of the counterpoint, the variety which Mendelssohn brings to the recitatives to ensure that they always maintain the dramatic impetus, and the sheer beauty of many of the arias and choruses. Above all, there is no mistaking the work's considerable dramatic impact, epitomised by the vivid characterisation of Elijah himself.

John Bawden

Performing today:

Michael Cayton, Conductor

Conductor Michael Cayton has been Musical Director of the Chiltern Choir since 2003. Since then he has led the choir in a wide variety of works from Purcell to Eric Whitacre.

Lockdown brought new challenges and although the Choir was unable to meet in person it continued with weekly Zoom rehearsals and the creation and broadcast of virtual concerts. During this period Michael was kept extra busy recording sessions for BBC Radio 4 and St. Martin in the Fields.



Michael is also Director Music at Watford Philharmonic Society where he is into his 8th season. During that time, he has conducted performances of Britten's War Requiem, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and Bliss' Morning Heroes to commemorate the centenary of the end of the first world war.

Since 2003, Michael has been the Director of Music at St John's Wood Church in London, where he conducts both the critically acclaimed professional choir and the successful community Chamber Choir.

Having attended the Royal College of Music, where he studied piano, organ, and conducting, Michael won the Hilda Deane Anderson prize for conducting and improvisation, and became the first Millennium Organ Scholar at the Royal Hospital in Chelsea. As well as conducting, Michael is in demand as a pianist and organist, with regular appearances in Central London venues, especially at St. Martin in the Fields. He lives in Watford and is married with two boys.

Ian Shaw, Accompanist

Ian Shaw studied at Cambridge (where he was Organ Scholar of St John's College and a John Stewart of Rannoch Scholar in Sacred Music), at the Sweelinck Conservatorium in Amsterdam and (more recently, as a mature student) in the drama department of Goldsmiths College in London.



He has been Sub-Organist at Durham Cathedral and Director of Music at St Peter's Eaton Square. Subsequently, he has worked as a pianist with English National Opera, Opera North, Northern Ballet Theatre, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and, for eleven years, Scottish Opera, where he was responsible for numerous tours of the Highlands and Islands, once including Bermuda.

Since returning to London, he has continued to work as a freelance répétiteur, especially for Scottish Opera, Music Theatre Wales and Nederlandse Reisopera, and

often in contemporary repertoire. He has been involved in a number of world premieres in UK and abroad, including *The Trial* (Philip Glass), *Anthropocene* (Stuart MacRae), *Jab Molassie* (Dominique Le Gendre, in Trinidad) and *Deniz Kustu* (Michal Ellison, in Istanbul). He has also coached young singers and pianists at the National Opera Studio and British Youth Opera and played with London choirs, including the BBC Singers, the Bach Choir and, on many occasions, the Chiltern Choir.

When Covid brought his work to an abrupt halt, he turned instead to composition, winning a number of prizes, most recently from Syracuse University in New York for *Solomon and the Gnat*, a tone-poem for organ based on the poem by Rumi, and from El Cor Canta in Barcelona for an orchestral cantata to Jacint Verdaguer's *La Lluna*.

Tom Isherwood, Baritone soloist

Thomas Isherwood was born in Watford, England and began his musical training as a cellist at the Watford School of Music.



After performing with several local dramatic societies and the National Youth Music Theatre of Britain he trained at the Royal Northern College of Music (BMus honours), Guildhall School of Music & Drama (MMus honours) and the Royal College of Music (ArtDip).

He made his professional debut in the chorus of Grange Park Opera alongside Sir Bryn Terfel in *Fiddler on the Roof* and returned the following year to perform the role of Happy in *La Fanciulla del West*. Following two years of professional work, he successfully auditioned for the Royal College of Music's International Opera Studio and in 2018 performed the role of Count Almaviva in *Le Nozze di Figaro* directed by Sir Thomas Allen.

In 2021 he returned to Grange Park Opera, performing the role of Male 2 in the world premiere of *The Life & Death of Alexander Litvinenko* and next year he will make his first appearance as a member of the Glyndebourne Festival Chorus. Most recently he performed the role of Fra Melitone in *La Forza Del Destino* by Verdi with Regents Opera, London.

Possessing a voice of great dramatic potential, Thomas hopes to perform the great baritone roles of Verdi & Puccini, whilst also maintaining a strong connection with the world of art song and recital performance whilst bringing opera and classical singing to new audiences through accessible, appealing programming and clear communication through performance.

Thomas currently studies with Timothy Evans-Jones and Caroline Dowdle.

Chiltern Choir Members singing this evening

Soprano

Caroline Bartlett
Mary Bungard
Gabrielle F
Christine Guy
Barbara Johnson
Sarah Moreton
Gill Watson

Hilary Broadbent
Marian Davies
Jennifer Gorsuch
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Bass

Steve Anderson
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The following people have been made honorary members in recognition of their extended service to the choir:

Mrs K. Darby	Mr J. Facer	Mr M. Gaudie
Prof. I. Howarth	Mr D. Lloyd	Dame G. Pugh
Mrs A. Sedgwick	Mr D. Treanor	Mr N. Wax

Programme compiled and designed by Beryl Whittaker



Forthcoming events and concerts

Our 2021/2022 Season will continue with:

Saturday 2 July 2022

An Evening of Jazz

Details to be confirmed

Saturday 22 October 2022

Bring and Sing workshop

Details to be confirmed.

Details of our 2022/2023 season will be put up on to the website
when confirmed

Details of events can be found on our website **www.chilternchoir.org.uk**

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