

President: Patricia Parkes

Conductor: Michael Cayton

presents

Vaughan Williams
A Sea Symphony

Chris Williams
Songs of the Coromandel Coast

Morten Lauridsen
Sure on this Shining Night

chilternchoir.org.uk facebook.com/ChilternChoir

Registered charity #284064

PARADE PHARMACY

CHORLEYWOOD



- Prescription Collection/Delivery
- Repeat Dispensing
- Medicine Use Reviews
- Stop Smoking Clinics
- Inhaler Technique Checks

WE STOCK A RANGE OF PRODUCTS

- · Tisserand Aromatherapy
- Disability & Incontinence Aids

OPENING HOURS: WEEKDAYS 9am-6pm SATURDAY 9am-5pm

18, Main Parade, Chorleywood, WD3 5RB Tel: 01923 283449

www.paradepharmacv.chorlevwood@nhs.net



MOTORISTS' ONE STOP CENTRE

MOT
Repairs – Servicing
Brakes
Shocks
Tyres
Batteries
Alignment

All major credit cards

90 UXBRIDGE ROAD RICKMANSWORTH 01923 721008

www.fairwayrickmansworth.co.uk

James Peddle Ltd

INDEPENDENT FUNERAL SERVICES

Home Arrangements by Appointment Golden Charter Pre-Payment Plans Probate Advisory Service

> 10 MONEYHILL PARADE UXBRIDGE ROAD RICKMANSWORTH WD3 7BE 01923 772013

> > 172 NEW ROAD CROXLEY GREEN RICKMANSWORTH WD3 3HD 01923 775013

51 LOWER ROAD CHORLEYWOOD WD3 5LQ 01923 286102

chorleywood

EYE CENTRE

47c Lower Road Chorleywood WD3 5LQ 01923 286 434 chorleywoodeyecentre.com

Chorleywood Eye Centre -your local Optician

- Eye examinations
- Contact lenses
- Glasses
- Sunglasses

A welcome from the Chair

This first concert of our 2024/5 season has a theme of the sea, as we mark twenty years since the tragedy of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.

Other season dates can be found at the back of this programme. Coming up next is the Chiltern Singer's Christmas concert, at The Hillside Centre on



December 8. This will be a fund-raiser for the main Choir; do please come along and sing some carols with us.

We have more lovely music in the season ahead and I hope that we will see you again at our concerts next year. We are also looking forward to a second chance to sing Michael's commission *The Way Through the Woods* at St John's Wood Church in May. Everyone is welcome.

At the end of the summer some of us sang three weekend services in Exeter Cathedral, a truly uplifting experience. Next year we hope to have a concert tour to the West Country. Watch this space!

It is lovely to see you here tonight.

Lyndsay Ward Chair

Programme

Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Sea Symphony (Texts by Walt Whitman)

- 1. A Song for all Seas, all Ships
- 2. On the Beach at Night, Alone
- 3. (Scherzo) The Waves
- 4. The Explorers

Interval

Morten Lauridsen: Sure on this Shining Night

Chris Williams: Songs of the Coromandel Coast

Soprano – Victoria Mulley Baritone – Peter Willcock

Piano – Simon Howat

Choir members singing this evening

Sopranos:

Caroline Bartlett Barbara Johnson Sam Beard Sue Kesteven

Hilary Broadbent Charlotte Kohnhorst

Mary Bungard Sarah Moreton
Gabrielle Fisher Gillian Proctor
Jill Haslam Lyndsay Ward
Katherine Hyde Gill Watson

Altos:

Cathy Amos Claire Hearnshaw
Marian Davies Miriam Morgan
Ana de'Ath Maggie Shrive
Rita Fryer Beryl Whittaker

Philippa Goss

Tenors:

Philip Brown Anju Sharda Gijs Crone Isabel Walker

Andy Etchells

Basses:

Simon Boulcott Robert Thackery
Paul Davies Richard Watson
John Haslam Tim Wynne-Jones

Martin Robinson

A Sea Symphony

After the death of Purcell in 1695, English music went into a long period of decline that lasted until the late 19th century. Eventually, the tireless efforts of Charles Stanford, Hubert Parry, and others brought about the long-awaited English musical renaissance, which reached its full flowering with the emergence of Edward Elgar. He was followed by a whole new generation of talented composers, the leading figure of which was Ralph Vaughan Williams, who for half a century remained one of the most influential figures in English music. Like Elgar, he too was a late developer, reaching his midthirties before attracting serious attention as a composer.

As the 19th century gave way to the 20th the work of the American poet Walt Whitman seemed to many to capture the essence of the new age, portraying an optimistic vision of a world inspired by human and scientific endeavour and the spirit of adventure. As well as Vaughan Williams, several other British composers – notably Holst and Delius – turned to Whitman's ground-breaking collection Leaves of Grass for inspiration. The radical, humanistic philosophy of Whitman's verse held a particular appeal for Vaughan Williams. He had already produced some songs to Whitman texts when, in 1903, he began to think about writing something of an altogether larger scale. First came Toward the Unknown Region (1907), also a setting of Whitman. Then in 1909, after a gestation of nearly six years, he completed A Sea Symphony, the great choral and orchestral work which, more than any other, put Vaughan Williams firmly on the musical map when it was first performed in October 1910 (only a few weeks after his Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis).

The *Sea Symphony* is a remarkable achievement. Vaughan Williams was not blessed with the natural talent of a Holst or a Britten; his success was due in large part to his single-minded determination. Though in his thirties, he was still a relatively inexperienced composer and had so far made only a modest impression on the musical world, yet for his first symphony he chose to write a choral symphony, a hugely ambitious project and one with almost no precedent. True, Beethoven and Mendelssohn had both produced choral symphonies, but these are essentially orchestral works with the addition of soloists and chorus in the last movement. The closest parallel is Mahler's monumental 8th symphony. However, since this was premiered only a month before the *Sea Symphony*, Vaughan Williams must have been unaware of it for most, if not all, of the time that he was composing his own work.

Vaughan Williams proved more than equal to the challenging task he had set himself. British choral music had enjoyed a long and distinguished tradition, from Purcell and Handel through to Stanford, Parry, and Elgar, but the striking originality of the *Sea Symphony*, the masterly handling of the orchestral and choral forces, its boldness, energy, and vivid orchestration, all set it apart as a wholly new and important addition to the choral repertoire. Even more significantly, it hailed the triumphant arrival of a new and powerful voice in English music. Vaughan Williams had succeeded in creating a definitive musical style drawn from genuinely English roots, rather than continuing, as his immediate predecessors had chosen to do, in the Austro-German tradition that had dominated European music since Beethoven's time.

The composer selected verses from Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* for the first three movements, and from his *Passage to India* for the last. Whitman uses images of brave sailors exploring the vast oceans as a colourful metaphor for the voyage through life of the human soul, a universal message that must have held considerable personal significance for Vaughan Williams, who at that time was still striving for recognition.

The first movement, 'A Song for all Seas, all Ships', opens with a brief but dramatic brass fanfare in B flat minor, immediately reiterated by the choir to the stirring words, "Behold, the sea itself", and arrestingly transposed to the tonic key of D major at the word 'sea'. These two devices – the fanfare itself and the harmonic juxtaposition of major and minor tonalities a third apart – recur throughout the work as unifying features. This opening section of the symphony vividly evokes the immensity and primal force of the sea. A change of mood is introduced with the appearance of a shanty-like theme depicting the "dashing spray" and "winds piping and blowing". The fanfare returns for the soprano soloist's dramatic appearance, when the focus of attention shifts to the "soul of man". A moving lament for those who have lost their lives at sea then leads to the final section, an extended passage beginning with the words "Emblem of man elate above death", culminating in a powerful climax, after which the waves subside and calm is restored.

The slow movement, 'On the Beach at Night Alone', is an atmospheric nocturne introduced by the orchestra, whose alternating tonalities of C minor and E major evoke the lapping of waves on the shore. The baritone soloist ponders humankind's place in the "vast similitude" that encompasses

and unites all time and space. He is joined by the full chorus, and the music gradually increases in intensity. The reflective mood then returns, the soloist's meditations soon dissolving into a tranquil orchestral epilogue.

The third movement, 'The Waves', is purely pictorial, and is a virtuosic scherzo for choir and orchestra. Beginning with a modified version of the fanfare motif, Vaughan Williams brilliantly depicts the sea in all its fearsome power, with an exhilarating portrayal of wind and waves and the great vessel ploughing its way through the ocean.

The finale, 'The Explorers', opens with the majestic phrase "O vast Rondure, swimming in space", set to a melody which the composer later acknowledged was strongly influenced by Elgar's Dream of Gerontius. This expansive introduction prepares the way for further development of the metaphysical concepts explored in the first two movements. The climax of the movement, and of the symphony, is reached at "Finally shall come the poet worthy that name, the true son of God shall come singing his songs". There follows a sublime duet for the soprano and baritone soloists, after which an urgent cry of "Away, O soul, hoist instantly the anchor" is heard to a shanty rhythm, and the ship is made ready. The concluding section of the work is serenely radiant, as the anchor is weighed and both ship and soul set sail on their quest, eventually disappearing from view as they voyage into the great unknown.

John Bawden

Sure on this Shining Night

The poem *Sure on This Shining Night* was written by Pulitzer-prizewinning author James Agee (1909–1955), from Tennessee. It appears in his only poetry collection, *Permit Me Voyage*, from 1934. The text, though not well-known, has been set to music by prominent choral composers such as Z. Randall Stroope and René Clausen, in addition to the setting by Morten Lauridsen featured in this concert.

Lauridsen (b. 1943) used Agee's poem in his choral song cycle *Nocturnes*, published in 2005. A Washington native, Lauridsen taught composition at the University of Southern California. In 2006 he was named an 'American Choral Master' by the National Endowment for the Arts. His choral pieces have been recorded by acclaimed groups such as Conspirare, Polyphony, and the Los Angeles Master Chorale.

Lauridsen's setting of *Sure on This Shining Night* is characteristic of his harmonic language, being firmly anchored in a key with frequent dissonances. The first two stanzas begin with beautiful melodic lines sung by the men in unison. The women repeat the melodies while the men provide supporting harmonies that build to the climactic third stanza. Each voice part is given expressive vocal lines that are rewarding to the singers and audience alike.

Songs of the Coromandel Coast

Chris Williams began his musical career at the age of eight as a chorister at St Paul's Cathedral, London. Having won a scholarship to study Music at New College, Oxford, he went on to study postgraduate composition and piano at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, where he won several prestigious prizes, including the 1979 Royal Philharmonic Prize for composition.

He has lived in India since 2002, firstly as Composer-in-Residence at the Lawrence School, Sanawar, for whom he wrote a musical play, *The Coolie's Tale*, to celebrate the centenary of the Kalka–Shimla Railway. Back in 1981 he had written a musical adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* for the school, which toured all of India.

In 2004, he moved to Bangalore, and has earned his living by playing the piano, and, by accident, has become an actor and model, appearing in two Bollywood films, corporate films, and adverts. In 2004, he was Musical Director of *Stand Up, Noah Small!*, performed by children from 19 schools in Bangalore. In 2008, his *Songs of the Coromandel Coast* and *Tsunami Requiem* were performed at the Royal Festival Hall, London, by the English Philharmonia Orchestra and Chorus.

On Boxing Day 2004 at 07:58 local time, a major earthquake, with a magnitude of 9.2, struck off the west coast of Northern Sumatra, Indonesia. The ensuing tsunami, with waves up to 30 metres high, devastated communities along the surrounding coasts of the Indian ocean, killing an estimated 230,000 people in 14 countries. It is recorded as the worst tsunami disaster in history, and tonight we mark the 20th anniversary of the disaster.

Songs of the Coromandel Coast tells the story of the disaster from different points of view. In the opening movement, 'Lowlands', the soloist tells the tale of a giant wave which long ago killed many thousands of people. The wave washed away merchants, nobles in their mansions, orchards, and gardens; nothing survived. Then the wave returned again. All through the movement the choir sing the sea shanty, Lowlands, lowlands away, my John.

The second movement, 'Dignity', is based on the sea shanty What shall we do with the drunken sailor, but in this case exchanges "Sailor" for "Fisherman". The movement describes what the wave does to the fisherman, how it ruins their lives, scares away the fish, and how they lose all hope. The middle section of the movement is a lament of the fisherman's wives, "What shall we do when they're blind from drinking? Drunk and depressed, all their hopes are sinking." The movement ends angrily, dealing with the humanitarian response to the disaster and how it made them feel.

The third movement, 'Nets', tells the story of young girls going to wash their hair by the sea shore while the local boys look on. The girls see the horizon begin to shimmer as the wave approaches, and the ensuing chaos tells of the force of the flood, with boats lifted from their moorings and crashing into bodies. The fisherman's nets float free, entangling the girls' hair and drowning them. Throughout the movement the choir sings the shanty Tom's gone to Hilo and, after the wave, Shenandoah.

The fourth movement, 'The Tree of Life', is based on the shanty Haul away, Joe, and tells of the effect of the tsunami on a young boy. He dreams of bcoming a fisherman like his father. Then the wave comes; he is swept away, but manages to cling on to a tree trunk. He sees his mother collide with the tree and be killed. He drags his mother's body through the wreckage

and mud to a village but when he gets there he finds it completely destroyed, the streets awash with corpses. He finds out that his entire family has been killed, and he loses the will to speak. Some time later the boy begins to recover and begins a new life.

The final movement, 'New Voices', is based on the Sanskrit Prayer Gayanti Mantra. The soloist tells of the aftermath of the disaster. The villagers meet to see new plans drawn up by the government and NGOs. The men complain of the loss of their livelihoods and that they have lost all hope; the women intervene, suggesting new ways to live, cultivate crops, and build new homes. The work finishes with everyone singing the Gayanti Mantra: "A prayer of praise that awakens the vital energies and gives liberation. We meditate upon the radiant Divine Light of that adorable Sun of Spiritual Consciousness; may it awaken our intuitional consciousness."

This Evening's Performers

Michael Cayton - Conductor

The 2022/3 season saw Michael celebrate his 20th year as the Chiltern Choir's musical director. Under his baton the Choir has performed a wide-ranging repertoire, from Monteverdi's *Vespers* to the *Mass in Blue* by Will Todd, and everything in between; he brings a wealth of choral conducting, arranging, and recording experience to his position.

Michael was appointed Director of Music of Watford Philharmonic Society in September 2014. As well as his duties to the Choir and WPS, Michael holds the position of Director of Music at St John's Wood Church, where he directs the critically acclaimed professional choir.

Over the years Michael has written a number of choral works, some of which are performed nationally by church choirs on a weekly basis. His Mass setting *Missa Beatae Virginis Mariae* has been performed by several choirs and is published by Shorterhouse publications, while 2024 saw the premiere of his *The Way Through the Woods*, a large-scale piece based on poems around the four seasons.

Michael also works as a freelance organist and pianist. He can be heard regularly playing for services and concerts at St Martin in the Fields and St Stephen's Church, Walbrook.

Victoria Mulley - Soprano

Victoria grew up in Bradford, West Yorkshire; she read Music at King's College London, and later gained a Masters with Distinction in Vocal Performance from Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. During her time at Trinity Laban she was awarded the Elliot Rosenblatt Memorial Scholarship and the Eva Malpass Scholarship, as well as winning the Paul Simm Opera Prize, the Linda Hirst Prize for Excellence in Contemporary Vocal Music, and the English Song Duo Prize (alongside pianist Francesca Lauri). Victoria was a finalist in the inaugural New Voices Singing Competition at the Northern Aldborough Festival 2023.

She has sung in operatic productions for companies including Barefoot Opera, Opera Loki, About Turn Theatre, and the New London Opera Group, appearing at the Tête à Tête, Grimeborn, and Edinburgh Fringe Festivals, and is equally at home on the concert stage, where she has performed as soprano soloist in oratorios including Haydn's *Nelson Mass*, Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle*, Fauré's *Requiem*, and Handel's *Messiah*, as well as appearing in recital across the UK.

As well as her solo work, Victoria sings regularly with the choir of St John's Wood Parish Church and is one of the two founders and directors of The Lyra Singers, a chamber choir based in Knightsbridge. She is also a keen composer and improviser; she debuted her first semi-improvised song cycle, *Ave Femina*, in May 2022, and is currently working on a second.

Peter Willcock - Baritone

Peter Willcock trained at Trinity College of Music, and lives and works in London and Norway. He is a regular member of the chorus at Oslo Opera and has appeared in the extra choruses of the Royal Opera House, English National Opera, and Welsh National Opera; recent engagements include *The Rakes Progress*, *Aida, Rigoletto, Otello*, and *Nabucco*. For the National Theatre he has appeared as singer/actor in *Amadeus*, and more recently in *The Corn is Green*.

As a soloist he has performed many oratorios including Handel's *Messiah, Requiems* by Fauré, Verdi, Mozart, and Derufle; *Passions* by J.S. Bach; Haydn's *Seasons*, and *Creation*. Highlights include Haydn's *Nelson Mass* under Charles Mackerras, and *Gurrelieder* at the Royal Festival Hall.

Opera roles include Leporeelo, Dulcamara, Papageno, Monterone, Aeneas, Geronimo, and numerous roles in new operas.

Upcoming engagements include Yeoman of the Guard, It's a Wonderful Life, and Tannhäuser.

Simon Howatt - Piano

Simon was appointed as the Chiltern Choir's accompanist in summer 2022. He grew up in Buckinghamshire and studied music at Cambridge University, followed by postgraduate Piano Accompaniment at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, with Professors Nina Sereda and Paul Hamburger.

Over the last thirty years, he has been in demand as an accompanist, music examiner for ABSRM, and peripatetic piano instructor. On the concert platform, Simon has appeared as a two-piano/piano-duet pianist, an accompanist for instrumental/vocal recitals, and a concerto pianist performing with several regional orchestras. Further afield, he has played at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and Grimeborn Festival, accompanying chamber opera. In 2022, he added organ continuo playing to his portfolio and performed Bach's *B Minor Mass* with the Oxford Bach Soloists.

As the pianist for a number of choirs, including the Wooburn Singers in Beaconsfield, Simon has accompanied a large part of the choral canon over the years, with particular highlights being: Porgy and Bess, Verdi's Requiem, Brahms' German Requiem and Liebesieder Waltzes, Elijah, Carmina Burana, The Rio Grande, Belshazzar's Feast, Symphony of Psalms, The Bells, Dvorak's Stabat Mater, Dyson's Nebuchadnezzar, and Rossini's Petite Messe Solennelle; also Arion and the Dolphin and The Passing of the Year by Jonathan Dove.

Patrons and Honorary Members

If you would like closer involvement with the Chiltern Choir, consider becoming a patron. For a modest annual fee we offer:

- Complimentary concert tickets during the season
- Advance publicity
- Invitations to social and other events
- Recognition in concert programmes

If you would like to lend your support in this way, please contact Stuart Marshall – info@chilternchoir.org.uk.



Our current patrons are:

Mr L. Anthony Mrs S. Lawman
Mr H. Bell Mr S. Morgan
Mrs C. Dyas Mrs B. Tomsett
Mr S. Frank Mrs S. Treanor

Mr N.B. & Mrs W.M. Kingon

The following have been made honorary members, in recognition of extended service to the Choir:

Mrs Patricia Parkes – President Dame Gillian Pugh – Vice-President

Mrs K. Darby Mr M. Gaudie Prof. I.D. Howarth

Mr D. Lloyd Mr D. Treanor



The Chiltern Singers, a small group drawn from the Chiltern Choir, is available to sing at events – weddings, funerals, social functions, etc.

Please direct enquiries to John Haslam by email (preferred): chilternsingers@chilternchoir.org.uk or by 'phone, 01494 724125

The Chiltern Choir – dates for your diary:

2024 December 8: A Chiltern Christmas.

The Chiltern Singers perform carols old and new. Hillside Centre, Chorleywood, 17:00–18:00 (see back cover)

2025 *April 5: Beethoven!* The *Mass in C* and *Choral Fantasia*.

2025 June 28: Songs of Light. Including works by Bach, Tallis, Elgar, and Eric Whitacre.

Look out for details at chilternchoir.org.uk or on facebook

