

Pre-performance talk by John Butt 7.30 pm

## Cambridge Taverner Choir

Owen Rees *director*

John Butt *organ*

### P R O G R A M M E

J S Bach 1685–1750

*Fürchte dich nicht*, BWV 228

*O Jesu Christ, meins Lebens Licht*, BWV 231

*O Mensch, bewein' dein' Sünde gross*

Organ: *O Mensch, bewein' dein' Sünde gross*, BWV 622

Heinrich Schütz 1585–1672

*Ich bin ein rechter Weinstock*, SWV 389

*Selig sind die Toten*, SWV 391

J S Bach

*Komm, Jesu, komm*, BWV 299

### I N T E R V A L

Heinrich Schütz

*Singet dem Herrn*, SWV 35

Johann Kuhnau 1660–1722

*Tristis est anima mea*

J S Bach

*Kommst du nun, Jesu, vom Himmel herunter*

Organ: *Kommst du nun, Jesu, vom Himmel herunter*, BWV 650

*Singet dem Herrn*, BWV 225

"Motet ... is a notated musical composition, heavily adorned with fugue and imitation, based on a biblical text and purely for singing without instruments (apart from the thorough bass). However, the vocal parts can also be filled out and strengthened with all kind of instruments."

J G Walther's definition (in his *Musicalisches Lexicon* of 1732) of the motet of Bach's era is significant both for its clarity and its vagueness: motets are works based on biblical texts (and, incidentally, chorales) without the madrigalian elements of cantatas and their concomitant musical forms of recitative and *da capo* arias; all the musical lines are sung, either unaccompanied or doubled by various instruments. No details are given of the purpose or form and few references are made to the musical devices employed. Indeed a variety of works belong to the genre of the motet: both those written in the tradition of Renaissance polyphony, performed every week in the Lutheran liturgy and the staple diet of the lesser choirs under Bach's jurisdiction, and those written for special occasions.

Bach's compositions in the second category are the only works of their kind; all elements of their style and form can be traced in various compositional traditions, but as occasional works, employing all the talented singers at Bach's disposal, they are unique and unsurpassed. Most seem connected with funerals for important figures in Leipzig, although some material may come from earlier stages in Bach's career. Only *Der Geist hilft* contains a



specific autograph dedication, for the funeral of J.H. Ernesti, rector of the Thomasschule, in October 1729.

*Komm Jesu Komm* was probably written also for a Leipzig funeral; the text, from a poem by Paul Thymich, had previously been set by Schelle in 1684 for the internment of another headmaster of the Thomasschule. Bach sets the first strophe in eight parts, employing a new musical idea for each line of the text, and vividly capturing, in the emotional rise and fall of the musical phrases, the sense of world-weariness and yearning that pervades the text. In the second strophe, Bach adopts a simple chorale style in four parts.

*Furchte dich nicht* is probably one of Bach's earliest motets, closely following models from his Thuringian environment. The two passages from Isaiah (both beginning with the line "Be not afraid") were quite popular in motet writing and the incorporation of a Lutheran chorale in the final section is also typical of the genre. Bach adopts the rhetorical style of his elder contemporaries where the music seems both to speak and express the text, but the harmony and intervals are far bolder. Indeed, this is perhaps the most tonally colourful of Bach's motets. The closing fugal section provides not only an invertible counterpoint of two musical lines but also of two lines of the Isaiah text which suggest that Redemption through Christ is intertwined with his personal calling of one's name. This is coupled with a chorale melody and text addressed to Christ as the fount of all joy. This musical counterpoint depicts several ideas simultaneously, together with the intimacy between Christ and the believer: in this way music can make a theological point that cannot be so directly made by words alone.

Tonight's selection represents two areas of Schutz's output. The setting of *Singet Dem Herrn* comes from the early publication of polychoral psalms (1619), closely following the pattern of Schutz's teacher, Gabrieli. It aims at expansive choral effects, which depict the whole of creation worshipping God. There are many passages that imitate aspects of nature and mankind, including interesting impersonations of harps, trumpets and trombones. The two shorter motets (*Ich bin ein rechter Weinstock* and *Selig sind die toten*) come from Schutz's *Geistliche Chormusik* of 1648. This publication Schutz intended as a demonstration of an older style of composition, one in which the voices were so written that they did not require the support of instruments. However, rather than returning to the church style of Palestrina or Lassus, the music is highly expressive with many changes of texture and affect. In some ways it represents a very late arrival of the madrigal style in a church context, that of the Lutheran confession which put the text and its presentation in pride of place.

## Friday 4 August 8pm • Church of Our Lady and the English Martyrs

The name of Johann Kuhnau often evokes a shadowy figure who lives in the footnotes of Bach biographies, someone who forms part of the background musical culture against which Bach can ever more brightly shine. Indeed it was Kuhnau who inspired Bach in his choice of the title *Clavierübung* for four keyboard publications, it was he who collaborated with Bach in the examination of the organ at Halle in 1716, and it was he whom Bach succeeded as cantor of the Thomaskirche, Leipzig, in 1723. Furthermore, Kuhnau's nephew, Johann Andreas, was Bach's first principal copyist of cantata parts and must have enjoyed a close association with the new cantor.

Only comparatively recently has Kuhnau's church music been given a modicum of the attention it deserves. The impression gained from his later reputation and apparent antipathy towards innovation is entirely overturned. Indeed, his church music is full of just the Italianate forms he condemned in the overly operatic church composers of the time. The motet *Tristis est anima mea* shows the preservation of the traditional church style (in keeping with the traditional Latin text); it is conservative in texture but extremely expressive within the bounds of the motet style (e.g., the chromatic scale for 'ad mortem'). This piece, apparently performed by J S Bach, is not securely attributable to Kuhnau. However, it shows the work of a skilled and highly imaginative composer with considerable dramatic flair.

Although Bach's *Singet dem Herrn* represents some of Bach's most spectacular vocal writing, we still do not really know for what occasion it was written. The text – on the one hand celebratory (extracts from Psalms 149 and 150) and, on the other, concerned with mortality (a Lutheran chorale) – would be appropriate both for a joyous occasion and for funerals. The work certainly comes from the period of Bach's zenith as a church composer (c. 1726–7) when he had already composed over two cycles of cantatas. Gone are the awkward intervals and pungent chords of *Furchte dich nicht*, but Bach's mature control of large vocal textures and ease of part-writing are readily apparent. The opening movement presents a kaleidoscopic alternation of forces and texture not unlike that of the Third Brandenburg concerto; it develops into a four-part fugue, the most dazzling section of the piece. The central dialogue between chorale (Choir 2) and aria (Choir 1) creates a more meditative atmosphere before the return of the opening mood of praise. In all, Bach tries to sum up the entire praise of the cosmos as depicted in the last two psalms, by pushing the potentials of an eight-voice choir to their very limit.

Notes by John Butt

The Cambridge Taverner Choir emerged from the Oxford and Cambridge choral tradition and has, over twenty years, built a reputation for powerful and expressive performances of Renaissance polyphony. Since reaching the shortlist for the Gramophone Early Music Award in 1994, the choir has received acclaim for its concerts and recordings in Britain and abroad. In recent years, the choir has performed at the York Early Music Festival and the Oslo Church Music Festival, and released its fourth CD, *Music from Renaissance Portugal II*. The choir regularly performs to enthusiastic audiences in the beautiful and resonant medieval environments of Jesus College Chapel and Little St Mary's Church in Cambridge. For further information, please see the Choir's website [www.cambridgetavernerchoir.org.uk](http://www.cambridgetavernerchoir.org.uk).

Owen Rees is both scholar and performer; his work as a scholar has consistently informed his work as a performer. As director of the Cambridge Taverner Choir, A Capella Portuguesa and the Choir of the Queen's College, Oxford, he has, for instance, brought to the concert hall and the recording studio substantial repertoires of magnificent, and previously unknown, music from

Renaissance Portugal – the fruits of his research in such cities as Coimbra and Lisbon. His interpretations of this repertory have been acclaimed as "rare examples of scholarship and musicianship combining to result in performances that are both impressive and immediately attractive to the listener", and he has been described as "one of the most energetic and persuasive voices" in this field.

As well as his pioneering work in the music of Renaissance Portugal, Rees has also specialised in the music of Tudor England and of Spain in the Golden Age. Over the twenty years of its existence, he has directed the Cambridge Taverner Choir in a wide survey of Renaissance music not only from these countries, but also from Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands. Owen Rees began his academic career as Organ Scholar at St Catharine's College, Cambridge. After a spell as College Lecturer in Music at St Peter's College and St Edmund Hall, Oxford, he taught at the University of Surrey, and in 1997 returned to Oxford as Fellow in Music and Organist at The Queen's College, Lecturer in Music at Somerville College, and Lecturer in the Faculty of Music.

### Choir

Helen Arnold, Paul Baumann, Diana Baumann, Kieran Cooper, Josie Dixon, Mark Dourish, James Durran, Helen Garrison, Rachel Godsill, Simon Godsill, Hester Highton, Stephen Jones, Bernadette Nelson, Caroline Preston Bell, Tom Salmon, Edwin Simpson, Gary Snapper, Sally Terris, David Thomson, Paul Watson, Tanya Wicks.

## Saturday 5 August

### MUSIC FOR KIDS

#### Saturday 5 August 11–2pm • West Road Concert Hall

##### Come and Play Orchestral!

£6, children £3. Family ticket (2 adults, 2 children)  
£15 Box Office 01223 357851

Led by members of the Orchestra of St John's Smith Square this is open to any age and any standard. A fun packed musical experience culminating in a final informal performance of some great classics.

#### Saturday 5 August 3pm

##### Walking Tour of Cambridge Organs

(approx. 2 hours – meet at 2.50pm)

Start at Clare College  
Three different organs in three different historic chapel settings to see and hear – Clare, Magdalene and St John's. Each building will be introduced by distinguished art historian Dr Paul Binski, followed by a short recital by Anne Page. Tickets £12.

