

Leap *Into Spring* with the Bach Choir in a British-inspired choral music concert featuring works by Wallen and McDowall alongside former Bach Choir Music Director Vaughan Williams & Britten



Thursday 19 May 2022, 7:30pm
Holy Trinity Sloane Square, London

Vaughan Williams *Serenade to Music*
Cecilia McDowall *O Oriens*
Vaughan Williams *Movements from Mass in G*
Errollyn Wallen *Pace*
Lili Boulanger *Hymne au soleil*
Amy Beach *Let this mind be in you*
Benjamin Britten *Rejoice in the Lamb*

David Hill director
David Hill conductor
Philip Scriven organ
Alison Ponsford-Hill soprano
Helen Charlston mezzo soprano
Hugo Hymas tenor
Jonathan Brown baritone

"The real star of this show was The Bach Choir itself, and the standard of choral singing throughout was impressively high."

Arts Desk

The Bach Choir and conductor **David Hill** perform a diverse programme, which **features** four female composers and shines a light on some truly fresh and inspirational works by Errollyn Wallen CBE, Amy Beach, Cecilia McDowall and Lili Boulanger alongside Ralph Vaughan Williams and Benjamin Britten. In the beautiful and intimate setting of Holy Trinity Church Sloane Square, David Hill

conducts The Bach Choir, soloists Alison Ponsford-Hill, Helen Charlston, Hugo Hymas and Jonathan Brown with Philip Scriven at the organ.

The Bach Choir's Director David Hill discusses the programme.



"It's Time We All Heard the Music of Lili Boulanger."

January 6, 2020, issue of New York Magazine

A child prodigy, Marie-Juliette Olga ("Lili") Boulanger became, in 1913 at the age of nineteen, the first female winner of the Prix de Rome for composition, having announced at sixteen her intention to become a composer. She studied composition primarily with Georges Caussade and Paul Vidal. Throughout her life, Lili suffered from ill health. A near-fatal bout of bronchial pneumonia at the age of two permanently weakened her immune system, and she contracted 'intestinal tuberculosis' (which it is likely that modern medicine would diagnose as Crohn's Disease), from which she was to die at just 24.

Boulanger left behind a handful of compositions for choir; one of the finest is the gripping "Hymne au Soleil" ("Hymn to the Sun"). The rich, sometimes blurred harmonies of Boulanger's piece evoke the colours of Monet's clouds, while the ostinato crotchets throughout the piece suggest the infinite waves that envelop the harbour in the painting.

"One of my earliest musical memories was the Bach Choir at the Royal Festival Hall performing St Matthew Passion. My mother sang with the Bach Choir for many years and was therefore in the choir on this occasion and my father often played in the orchestra as principal flautist."

Cecilia McDowall in an exclusive interview with The Bach Choir

Based in London, Cecilia McDowall is known for her choral works, though her output extends far beyond this and into the realm of organ music. She has won many awards including the British Composer Award Choral category in 2014 for her haunting work, *Night Flight*.

Commissioned by Merton College, Oxford, as part of its 750th-anniversary celebrations, *O Oriens* (2012) is a setting of the fifth of the seven 'O Antiphons'

for Advent. In the text, Christ is hailed as the morning star, yet McDowall's shadowy harmonies and often veiled dynamics ensure that the threat of darkness is ever present. The music builds steadily to a climactic, full-throated reassertion of 'O Oriens', but the final paragraph is a subdued and solemn parting reminder of those who live 'in the shadow of death'.

"Pace is best understood as a single human breath; as a single line; as a world's long, long journey to light."

Errollyn Wallen

Pace, the most recent work on the disc, sets the single word 'pace' (the Latin for peace) was commissioned for an anthology. *Pace*, of course, is just unaccompanied. Wallen shared, "I wanted to write something very simple, just setting that one word. Originally the work was intended to be very short, maybe one minute — but it grew. *Pace* is actually a present dedicated to a dear friend, Ruari Murchison. I find it inspiring to think of a new piece of music as a gift."

Here is an exclusive interview with Music Director David Hill and composer Errollyn Wallen CBE.



English composer Benjamin Britten conducted The Bach Choir alongside the London Symphony Chorus, Highgate School Choir, London Symphony Orchestra, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Simon Preston, Sir Peter Pears and Galina Vishnevskaya in 1963, for a recording of his *War Requiem* with Decca.

Ralph Vaughan Williams holds an unrivalled position in the history of British music, and in the hearts of many classical music fans. For The Bach Choir though, it's personal – he sang in the choir for many years, and was their Music Director in the 1920s. *Serenade to Music* was written in 1938 as a tribute to Sir Henry Wood, and was first performed at the Royal Albert Hall with symphony orchestra and sixteen soloists, for whom the piece was specifically written, each one given a solo passage. His *Mass in G minor* of 1922 was the first substantial, unaccompanied setting to be written with a distinctly English voice since the time of William Byrd in the sixteenth century.

On 22 November 2022, The Bach Choir will join forces with the Philharmonia Orchestra to mark the 150th anniversary of Vaughan William's birth. This concert will feature *Overture, The Wasps, The Garden of Proserpine* and *A Sea Symphony*.

The Bach Choir



Founded in 1876, The Bach Choir is recognised as one of the world's leading choruses, building upon a tradition that combines musical excellence with creativity and innovation.

From the first performance in Britain of Bach's *Mass in B minor* 145 years ago to the soundtrack for Ridley Scott's epic *Prometheus*, the Choir's

musical heritage is as rich as it is diverse. Directed by David Hill, one of the country's most eminent conductors and choir trainers, the Choir regularly performs and records across London and the UK in prestigious venues, from the Royal Albert Hall to Abbey Road Studios.

Described by the London Evening Standard as 'probably the finest independent choir in the world', The Bach Choir values the freedom that its independence brings, allowing it to work with the very best orchestras and soloists, and to choose the music it performs. To date the Choir has sung over 400 works in more than 120 venues, and continues to share its work with audiences around the world. Following an invitation from the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, the Choir gave two performances of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* in Hong Kong's Cultural Centre just before Easter 2014, and it gave further concerts in Shanghai and Hangzhou. In October 2017, the Choir gave six concerts in the Netherlands of a *cappella* music and works for choir and organ, one of which was broadcast on Dutch radio. A five-city concert tour of the USA in March 2020 was cancelled at very short notice due to COVID-19.

With a strong commitment to new music, The Bach Choir has commissioned works from some of the world's leading composers including the late Sir John Tavener, Bob Chilcott, Jonathan Dove, Will Todd and Carl Rütti. In June 2017 the Choir gave the world premiere performance of James MacMillan's *Blow the trumpet in the new moon*, and commissioned Roxanna Panufnik to complete her *Four Choral Seasons*, which was premiered by the Choir in October 2019. This commitment continues over the 2021/22 season with the premiere of eleven new pieces written for The Bach Choir.

The Bach Choir has always been characterised by the commitment of its members. With over 250 talented singers coming from all walks of life, an international

touring schedule, and a pioneering participation programme, *Vocalise!*, that takes its passion for music into inner-city schools and dementia care homes, the Choir takes pride in performing, recording and sharing music for all to enjoy.

thebachchoir.org.uk

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