

Programme Notes and Song Sheet

Standard of St George – Kenneth Alford

The “British March King” and military bandmaster composed this rousing patriotic march (1930) after being inspired by a trooping of the colours at Buckingham Palace. Unlike many this march has a lively bass-line in its first half. This year marks the 70th anniversary of Alford’s death a week after VE Day.

Rose of England – Ivor Novello

Written by the Welsh composer for his musical “Crest of the Wave” (1937), this patriotic song lauding the Tudor Rose as a national symbol has been suggested by many to be sung instead of “God Save the Queen” as the sporting anthem for English football. (Please join us and sing in the final part of the song.)

Rose of England thou shall fade not here,
Proud and bright from growing year to year.
Red shall thy petals be as rich wine untold,
Shared by thy warriors who served thee of old.
Rose of England breathing England’s air,
Flower of chivalry beyond compare.
While hand and heart endure to cherish thy prime,
Thou shalt blossom to the end of time.

I Vow to Thee My Country – Gustav Holst

Set by the composer (1921) to the tune of “Jupiter” from his Planets Suite, this patriotic poem was written (1903) by Cecil Spring Rice. The poem, honouring those who lost their lives, tells of loyalty to a country and a greater one where peace and gentleness reign eternal. The tune has become the sporting anthem for Rugby Union. (Please sing it with us.)

I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above,
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love;
The love that asks no question, the love that stands the test,
That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best;
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price,
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.

And there's another country, I've heard of long ago,
Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know;
We may not count her armies; we may not see her King;
Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering;
And soul by soul and silently her shining bounds increase,
And her ways are ways of gentleness, and all her paths are peace.

Viola Concerto in G minor – Cecil Forsyth

The viola was the Cinderella of the string family until the 20th century when its repertoire suddenly reached new virtuosic heights with concertos by Bartok, Penderecki, Gubaidulina etc. However Forsyth’s concerto (1903) for solo viola and orchestra with those of others marks a major British contribution to the viola concerto repertoire. Tonight we will hear the powerful final movement and see how “Cinderella”, the butt of many orchestral jokes, can really dance and sing at the ball.

633 Squadron (overture) – Ron Goodwin

Goodwin’s music to the opening credits of this 1964 film is arranged here for string orchestra. With its modest dimensions it aims to capture the spirit of the mighty symphonic forces at work in the original score. The film is also a love story set against the turmoil of war and focuses on what is reputedly the most versatile aircraft of WW2, the De Havilland Mosquito, and deliverer of many dangerous special missions.

“The Messiah” oratorio (selection) – George F Handel

German composer Handel wrote this oratorio aged 56 (1741) after being naturalized as a British subject 13 years before. The three parts of The Messiah take scripts from the King James Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. In Part 1, Isaiah prophesies the birth of Jesus: “And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it” (40:5) and “Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain made low, the crooked straight and the rough places plain.” (40:4).

“Christmas Concerto” – Arcangelo Corelli

This concerto (1690?) for two solo violins and cello “created for the night of the Nativity” set a new concerto style for Baroque Italian composers, spawning the fashion for an Italian composer to write a Christmas concerto. These final two (of six) movements aim to portray joy (Allegro) at the holy birth and shepherds abiding in the field (Pastorale).

Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas – Ralph Blane, Hugh Martin (lyrics)

From the 1944 film “Meet Me in St Louis”, young Esther (Judy Garland), who is in love with the boy next door, heart-achingly sings this song to comfort her little sister on Christmas Eve 1903, as the family prepare to leave their lives behind in St Louis, for New York.

A Christmas Festival - Leroy Anderson

Anderson only intended this to be an arrangement of some Christmas carols linked without a break for the Boston Pops Orchestra (1950). However his composer skills led him to write what is in effect, a Christmas overture, where the simple carols are enhanced by distinct symphonic embellishments.