

Canticle of Freedom was commissioned by Colchester Choral Society with help from private sponsors and Colchester Borough Council. It is dedicated to the memory of W H Swinburne, the founder and first conductor of the Society. It has since been performed by two other choirs and today's performance is its fourth.

It is a prayer for a new millennium of freedom and peace, and each of the four movements takes as its starting point one of the verses from the nineteenth-century Christmas hymn 'It came upon the midnight clear'.

Thus the first movement 'The world in solemn stillness lay' tells of a solemn, still, and peaceful earth, and the second, 'And still their heavenly music floats' speaks of a jubilant heaven. The third movement speaks of 'two thousand years of wrong' – the wars and persecution that have disfigured the last two millennia - and the last movement leads us from death to life, with a positive and joyful hope for the future: in the words of the hymn: 'When peace shall over all the earth its ancient splendours fling'.

The text has been selected from a variety of poets and sources, from mediaeval times to the present day, ranging from the fresh simplicity of Marguerite Wilkinson's 'A Chant for Out of Doors' sung by the children's choir in the opening movement, through the intense poignancy of Walt Whitman's 'Vigil Strange I kept on the Field one Night' sung by the baritone soloist in the third movement, to the religious ecstasy of Christopher Smart's 'For the trumpet of God is a blessed intelligence' which forms the basis of the second movement and the positive outlook of the verses from Tennyson's *In memoriam* which form the final section of the last movement - verses which are as true today as when they were penned in Victorian times.

'Canticle of Freedom' is splendidly balanced in the range of moods it encompasses, and this is reflected in the imaginative and colourful orchestration. The poignant drama of the third movement, which forms the central emotional core of the work, is powerfully conveyed in the brooding, atmospheric writing for strings and woodwind. The freshness of the pastoral opening includes some delicious gentle fluttering from the woodwind above the Soprano soloist. In the second movement the tuneful syncopations, which would have all the angels of heaven joyously dancing, are beautifully contrasted by a central section of quiet ecstasy which includes a distant echo of the children's music from the first movement. The final section, in which the last phrase of the hymn 'And all the world give back the song which now the angels sing' sails in triumphantly over a vigorous and tuneful setting of Tennyson's 'Ring out wild bells' provides an inspiring and unforgettable climax to this lovely work.

Notes by Ian Ray

Scoring:

Soprano and Bass-Baritone Soloists
Children's or Youth Choir (two parts)
SATB Choir

2 Flutes
2 Oboes
2 Clarinets in B flat
2 Bassoons

4 Horns in F (3rd and 4th optional)
2 Trumpets in B flat
2 Tenor Trombones
Bass Trombone (optional)
Tuba (optional)

Timpani (1 player)
Percussion (1 player) – Glockenspiel, Bell Tree, Triangle, Cymbal (clashed and suspended), Xylophone, Whip, Bass Drum, Tambourine, Tubular Bells

Violins 1 and 2
Violas
Cellos
Double-Basses

Alan Bullard

Canticle of Freedom: text

1 The world in solemn stillness lay

Choir (from *It came upon the midnight clear*, E. H. Sears, 1810-76)

The world in solemn stillness lay.

Children (from *A Chant out of Doors*, Marguerite Wilkinson, 1883-1928)

God of grave nights, God of brave mornings
God of still noon, Hear my salutation!

God of round hills, God of green valleys,
God of clear springs, Hear my salutation!

God of great trees, God of wild grasses,
God of bright flowers, Hear my salutation!

Soprano (from *Leaves*, William Barnes, 1801-86)

Leaves of the summer, lovely summer's pride,
Sweet is the shade below your silent tree,
Whether in waving copses, where ye hide
My roamings, or in fields that let me see
The open sky; leaves, your shade is sweet to me.
Leaves of the summer, lovely summer's pride,
Sweet is the shade below your silent tree,
Whether you wave above the early flow'rs
In lively green; or whether ye fly
On playful winds, around my feet.
O, leaves of the summer, lovely summer's pride!

Choir

...lovely summer's pride!

(*A Nocturne*, Wilfred Scawen Blunt, 1840-1922)

The Moon has gone to her rest,
A full hour ago.
The Pleiads have found a nest
In the waves below.
Slow, the Hours one by one
In Midnight's footsteps creep,
Lovers who lie alone
Soon wake to weep.
Slow-footed tortoise hours, will ye not hasten on,
Till from his prison
In the golden East
A new day shall have risen,
And the last stars be gone,
Like guests belated from a bridal feast?
When the long night is done
Then shall ye sleep.
The Moon has gone to her rest,
A full hour ago.

Children

God of grave nights, God of brave mornings
God of still noon Hear my salutation!

God of round hills, God of green valleys,
God of clear springs, Hear my salutation!

God of grave nights, God of still noon,
God of round hills, God of clear springs,

Children + Choir

Hear my salutation!

2 And still their heavenly music floats

Baritone, Choir (and Children) (from *Jubilate Agno*, Christopher Smart, 1722-71)

For the Trumpet of God is a blessed intelligence, and so are all the instruments in Heaven.

For God the Father Almighty plays upon the Harp of stupendous magnitude and melody.

For innumerable Angels fly out at ev'ry touch, and his tune is a work of creation.

For at that time malignity ceases, and the devils themselves are at peace.

For this time is perceptible to man by a remarkable stillness, and serenity of soul.

Soprano (from *The Celestial City*, Giles Fletcher, c.1588-1623, spelling modernized)

No Sorrow now hangs clouding on their brow,
No bloodless Malady empales their face,
No Age drops on their hairs his silver snow,
No Nakedness their bodies doth embase,
No Poverty themselves, and theirs disgrace,
No fear of death the joy of life devours,
No unchaste sleep their precious time deflow'rs,
No loss, no grief, no change wait on their winged hours.

Soprano, Baritone, Choir

For the Trumpet of God is a blessed intelligence, and so are all the instruments in Heaven.

For God the Father Almighty plays upon the Harp of stupendous magnitude and melody.

For innumerable Angels fly out at ev'ry touch.

Choir (from *It came upon the midnight clear*)

And still their heavenly music floats.

Tutti

For the Trumpet of God is a blessed intelligence, and so are all the instruments in Heaven!

3 Two thousand years of wrong

Choir (from *It came upon the midnight clear*)

And man at war with man: two thousand years of wrong.

Baritone (from *Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field one Night*, Walt Whitman, 1819-92)

Vigil strange I kept on the field one night;
When you my son dropped at my side that day,
One look I but gave which your dear eyes returned with a look I shall never forget,
One touch of your hand to mine reached up as you lay on the ground,
Then onward I sped in the battle, the even-contested battle....

Choir

And man at war with man: two thousand years of wrong.

Baritone

Till late in the night to the place at last again I made my way,
Found you in death so cold, dear comrade.
Long there and then in vigil I stood, dimly round me the
battlefield spreading,
Vigil wondrous, vigil sweet there in the fragrant silent night,
Vigil final for you brave boy,
Vigil for comrade swiftly slain, vigil I never forget, how as
day brightened
I rose from the chill ground and folded my soldier well in his
blanket,
And buried him where he fell.

Choir and Soprano

And man at war with man hears not the love-song which they
bring: two thousand years of wrong.

Children (*The Garden of Love*, William Blake, 1757-1827,
slightly altered)

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of the Chapel were shut,
And no-one would open the door;
So I turned to the Garden of love
That so many wild flow'rs bore;

And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tomb-stones where flowers should be;
And priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars my joys and desires.

Choir and Soprano (*The Blessed Dead*, Christina Rossetti,
1830-94)

They lie at rest, our blessed dead;
The dews drop cool above their head,
They knew not when fleet summer fled.

Together all, yet each alone;
Each laid at rest beneath his own
Smooth turf or white allotted stone.

When shall our slumber sink so deep,
And eyes that wept and eyes that weep
Weep not in the sufficient sleep?

God be with you, our great and small,
Our loves, our best-beloved of all,
Our own beyond the salt sea-wall.

They lie at rest, our blessed dead.

Children: Rest in peace!

4 When peace shall over all the earth

Choir (*International Prayer for Peace*)

Lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth:
Lead me from grief to hope, from fear to trust:
Lead me from hate to love, from war to peace:
Let peace fill our heart, our world, our universe.

(*Anonymous prayer*)

Set us free from poverty,
Set us free from misery,
Set us free from apathy,
Set us free from slavery,
Set us free from oppression,
Set us free from complacency,
Set us free from corruption,
Set us free from hypocrisy.

(from a *prayer* attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, c.1181-
1226)

Where there is hate, let me sow love:
Where there is doubt, let me sow faith:
Where there is injury, let me sow pardon:
Where there is despair, let me give hope:
Where there is darkness, let me give light:
Where there is sadness, let me give joy.

Children and Choir (from a *prayer* by John Donne, 1572-
1631, slightly altered)

Let there be no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light:
No noise and no silence, but one equal music:
No fears and no hopes, but one equal possession:
No ends nor beginnings, but one equal life.

Children (from *A Chant out of Doors*)

God of grave nights, God of brave mornings
God of still noon, Hear my salutation!

Soprano and Baritone (from *Humanity*, Richard Watson
Dixon, 1833-1900)

There is a soul above the soul of each,
A mightier soul, which yet to each belongs;
There is a sound made of all human speech,
And numerous as the concourse of all songs:
And in that soul lives each, in each that soul,
Tho' all the ages are its life-time vast;
Each soul that dies in its most sacred whole
Receiveth life that shall for ever last.
And thus for ever with a wider span
Humanity o'er-arches time and death.

Choir (*anonymous prayer*)

Give me peace: give me light: give me life!

Choir, Children, Soprano and Baritone (from *In
Memoriam*, Alfred Tennyson, 1809-92, altered)

Ring out the old, ring in the new
Ring, happy bells, above, below:
The past is going, let it go;
Ring out the false: ring in the true!

Ring out the age of tyranny,
The faithless tragedy of war:
Ring out the world of rich and poor,
Ring in the time of jubilee.

Ring out false pride in place and blood,
The civic slander and the spite:
Ring in the love of truth and right,
Ring in the common love of good.

Ring out old shapes of foul disease;
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;
Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace.

(from *It came upon the midnight clear*)

When peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendours fling,
And all the world give back the song
Which now the angels sing.

(from *In Memoriam*)

Ring in the just, ring in the free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;
Ring out the darkness of the land
Ring in the world that is to be!