

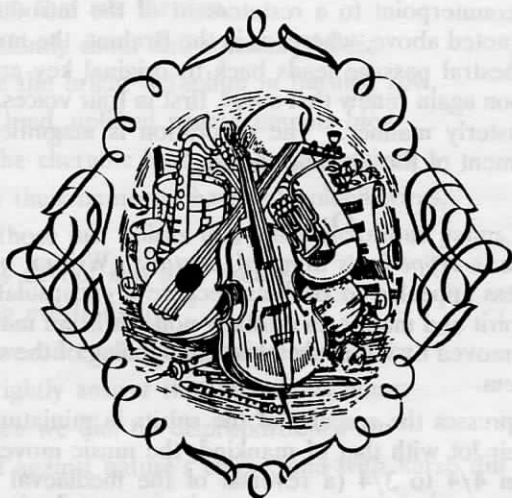
**EDINBURGH BACH SOCIETY**

Founded 1889

# **EDINBURGH BACH CHOIR**

**AND**

# **SCOTTISH SINFONIA**



**Patricia MacMahon**

**Soprano**

**Neil Mantle**

**Conductor**

**Saturday 26 February 1994**

**7.45pm**

**Greyfriars Kirk**

**PROGRAMME**

**50p**

## Blest Pair of Sirens (At a Solemn Music)

C.H.H. Parry

Entitled "An Ode" the music of this setting mirrors exactly the noble and solemn splendour of Milton's poem. The subject matter is similar to that of Brahms' setting of Hölderlin's poem in this evening's programme, but although in both the primal harmony of heaven and earth is shattered when "disproportioned sin Jarr'd against nature's chime, and with harsh din Broke the fair music that all creatures made To their great Lord," Milton's poem is profoundly Christian and ends with a wish that the original harmony shall be restored.

Set for eight-part chorus, the work begins with a spacious orchestral introduction leading to a homophonic setting of the opening lines. A fugato leads to an evocation of the heavenly hosts praising God in suitable splendour. The choir reduces to four parts for a unison counterpoint to a restatement of the introduction leading to the setting of the lines quoted above, where, as in the Brahms, the music changes into 3/4 time. Another orchestral passage leads back to original key and time for the final fugue "O may we soon again renew that song", first in four voices, then in eight, which is built up in a masterly manner. The peroration is magnificent, ending with an overwhelming statement of the opening theme.

## Song of Destiny

Op. 54

J. Brahms

The poem's full title is *Hyperion's Song of Destiny*. Written by the romantic poet Hölderlin, it doubtless appealed to Brahms because it encapsulates the dichotomy of heaven and earth, spirit and matter, in a totally non-Christian manner. We know that Brahms was deeply moved by it and sketched the opening of the work on the very day he first read the poem.

The first section expresses the serenity of the spirits in miniature sonata-form. The second contrasts their lot with that of mankind; the music moves from major key to relative minor, from 4/4 to 3/4 (a reversal of the mediaeval practice), with very agitated music reminiscent of the passage "Now death is swallowed up in victory" in the *German Requiem*. The poem ends on a note of gloom "at last do we pass away" after which the chorus is silent. But the rapture of the opening section returns in an orchestral epilogue, now in the bright major mode of the second section's relative minor. Both the gloomy end of the poem and the serenely optimistic final bars of the music are equally typical of the German romantic spirit which both Brahms and Holderlin exemplified.

*The performance of this work is dedicated to the memory of William D. Minay, an Honorary member of the Edinburgh Bach Society, who died on 18 February 1994.*

## INTERVAL

### Four Last Songs

R. Strauss

1. *Frühling (Spring)*
2. *September*
3. *Beim Schlafengehen (On going to sleep)*
4. *In Abendrot (At dusk)*

I find it hard to credit that these songs, products of the late romantic period, were written in my lifetime and received their first performance in the Albert Hall in London in 1950. Strauss, an extremely old man, had seen the destruction of his

country and, as he thought, culture, by the Second World War. The songs represent a serene acceptance of life, good and bad, and a readiness to face death.

In *Spring* the poet (Herman Hesse 1877-1962) speaks of the dream of spring, long dormant, awakening again and leading, quickening. The serenely smooth surface of the music is belied by its iridescent and ever-changing harmonies. Everything has the warm glow of late romanticism.

*September*, also by Hesse, paints the colours of the over-ripe, dying garden where everything droops under the weight of its own richness. Again we have the rich texture and harmonics, the seamless web of sound, the soaring string melodies over which the soloist floats sublimely.

In *On going to sleep* the sentiments of the previous poem are extended; after singing of weariness and a readiness for sleep the words go on to express the freedom of the soul to soar to a realm where a deeper and fuller love is possible. The harmony of the music is now serene, and the last verse is introduced by a long orchestral passage with a ravishing violin solo, doubtless representing the soaring spirit. The soloist then soars above this texture.

The last poem, by Eichendorff (1798-1857), talks of the joy and peace of an evening after the heat of the day has been passed with a beloved companion (two larks in the imagery of the poem). The string sound is now refulgent and the full orchestra plays for the first time in the cycle. Tranquillity and fulfilment are the dominating emotions. The last verse speaks of death as the end of a journey, and we hear a quotation from one of Strauss's early tone poems, *Death and Transfiguration*. The culmination of a life time is here, but also of an era - that period dominated by the German instrumental tradition, long dying, now gone for ever.

John Willmetts

### **The Spirit of England (for Soprano Soloist, Chorus and Orchestra) E. Elgar**

1. *The Fourth of August*

2. *To Women*

3. *For the Fallen*

The famous lines from Binyon's poem "They shall grow not old, as we that are left ...." have become part of the life of the nation (by which I mean both Scottish and English) as we celebrate and give thanks each year for the sacrifice that so many made in that most terrible of wars. Written in 1915 the poem, one of a collection, represents an attempt to reckon up the psychological cost of a war the likes of which civilised mankind had thought could no longer happen. Binyon, whom Elgar knew, had hoped that the composer would enable thousands "to have their grief glorified and lifted up and transformed" by music, because his "words alone seem all too insufficient and inexpressive"; after initial reluctance Elgar was persuaded to set the poems.

Elgar had seen, long before the war came, that an era, whose spirit he had captured in his music, was coming to an end, and with it his creative prowess. In these settings he manages to express the grief and horror which were now felt by all for the passing of an age whose certainties had seemed immutable.

In *The Fourth of August* the courage and self-sacrifice of those who willingly marched to war is portrayed through the heart-warming music which has come to be thought of as particularly English, but which springs from an identification with "this dear earth

that bore us" that goes beyond any mere nationalism and is more concerned with enduring and suffering than with the glory and the panoply of war. A passing reference to the enemy is illustrated by a quotation from the demons' chorus from *Gerontius*: this caused Elgar some bother as he and his contemporaries found it hard to credit the Germans with some of their deeds.

*To Women* is dominated by the soprano soloist and uses dark chromaticism to illustrate the gnawing pain of those who are left behind to endure.

*For the Fallen* has a solemn modal march as a kind of ritornello reminiscent of the march in Wagner's *Parsifal*. Later there is a quick march which uses material like that in Elgar's own *Falstaff*, when the vigour and manliness of those who have fallen are praised. This gives way to a setting of the famous words quoted at the beginning, set in 3/4 to suggest the timelessness of those who "grow not old". Returning to 4/4 for the peroration which involves a grand statement of the slow march we are exhorted to "remember them".

John Willmetts

**Patricia MacMahon** was born in Aberdeen and studied singing with Ena Mitchell at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, where she won numerous prizes and awards. As a recitalist she has appeared in Norway, France and Israel, as well as being much sought-after in her native Scotland. She has sung with choral societies throughout Scotland and England and with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. A frequent broadcaster, she appeared at the 1992 Edinburgh International Festival in a programme of "*Scotland's Music*", and is one of the singers in the two CDs which have been made of this. In April 1994 she travels to St Petersburg to give recitals with a student quartet from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, where she is a lecturer in singing.

**Neil Mantle** began conducting when he formed his own chamber orchestra at the age of fifteen. After attending the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama where he won the conducting prize, he studied with Roderick Brydon and Gyorgy Lehel. A semi-finalist in both the Kyril Kondrashin and Vittorio Gui competitions, he won second prize at the Leeds Competition in 1986. Invited to conduct the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, he has since worked with them both in the studio and in live concerts. He has also performed regularly with the Royal Scottish Orchestra since his debut in their Edinburgh and Glasgow Proms in June 1988. He is a guest conductor at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and was appointed conductor of the Edinburgh Bach Choir in January 1993. Forthcoming engagements include EMI recording sessions with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Edinburgh Bach Choir's next concert will be on 28 May 1994 in Greyfriars Kirk when the programme will include Bach's *Magnificat in D* and *Cantata No.11*.

The Edinburgh Bach Society gratefully acknowledges grants from The National Federation of Music Societies, the City of Edinburgh District Council and the Musicians' Union.

NO PART OF THIS CONCERT MAY BE RECORDED  
WITHOUT PRIOR PERMISSION OF THE EDINBURGH BACH SOCIETY

## BLEST PAIR OF SIRENS

Blest pair of Sirens, pledges of heav'n's joy,  
Sphere-born harmonious sisters, Voice and Verse,  
Wed your divine sounds, and mixed pow'r employ,  
Dead things with inbreathed sense able to pierce,  
And to our high-raised phantasy present  
That undisturbed song of pure concent,  
Aye sung before the sapphire-coloured throne  
To Him that sits thereon,  
With saintly shout and solemn jubilee;  
Where the bright Seraphim in burning row,  
Their loud, uplifted angel-trumpets blow,  
And the cherubic host in thousand quires,  
Touch their immortal harps of golden wires,  
With those just Spirits that wear victorious palms,  
Hymns devout and holy psalms  
Singing everlastingly;  
That we on earth with undiscording voice  
May rightly answer that melodious noise;  
As once we did, till disproportioned sin  
Jarred against nature's chime, and with harsh din  
Broke the fair music that all creatures made  
To their great Lord, whose love their motion swayed  
In perfect diapason, whilst they stood  
In first obedience, and their state of good.  
O may we soon again renew that song,  
And keep in tune with Heav'n, till God ere long  
To His celestial concert us unite,  
To live with Him, and sing in endless morn of light.

John Milton

## SCHICKSALS L I E D - S O N G O F D E S T I N Y

Ihr wandelt droben im Licht  
auf weichem Boden,  
selige Genien,  
glänzende Götterlüfte  
ruhren Euch leicht,  
wie die Finger  
der Künstlerin  
heilige Saiten.  
Schicksalos,  
wie der schlafende Säugling,  
athmen die Himmlischen:  
keusch bewahrt in bescheidener  
Knospe  
blühet ewig,  
ewig Ihnen der Geist.  
Und die seligen  
Augen blicken in stiller,  
ewiger Klarheit.  
Doch uns ist gegeben auf keiner  
Statte zu ruh'n;  
es schwinden, es fallen,  
die leidenden Menschen,  
blindlings von einer Stunde  
zur andern,  
wie Wasser von Klippe  
zu Klippe geworfen  
jahrlang in's Ungewisse hinab.

J.C.F. Hölderlin

Far in yon region of light  
where pleasures fail not  
wander the Spirits blest,  
breath'd on by airs of glory,  
bright and divine,  
like a harp,  
when a master-hand  
wakes it from silence.  
Free from care,  
like a babe that is sleeping,  
are they in heav'n that dwell:  
pure and lowly as half-open'd  
blossoms,  
in those fields of light  
they ever bloom.  
And in bliss  
are their eyes still gazing  
on clearness calm and eternal.  
But Man may not linger,  
and nowhere finds he repose;  
we stay not, but wander,  
we grief-laden mortals,  
blindly, from one sad hour  
to another,  
like water from cliff unto cliff  
ever dropping  
blindly at last do we pass away.

J. Troutbeck

## VIER LETZTE LIEDER - FOUR LAST SONGS

### 1. Frühling

In däm<sup>h</sup>migen Grü<sup>h</sup>ften  
Trä<sup>h</sup>umte ich lang  
Von deinen Baumen und blauen  
Lü<sup>h</sup>ften,  
Von deinem Duft und Vogelgesang.

Nun liegst du erschlossen  
In Gleiss und Zier  
Von Licht übergossen  
Wie ein Wunder vor mir.

Du kennst mich wieder,  
Du lockest mich zart,  
Es zittert durch all meine Glieder  
Deine selige Gegenwart.

### 2. September

Der Garten trauert,  
Kühl sinkt in die Blumen der Regen.  
Der Sommer schauert  
Still seinem Ende entgegen.

Golden tropft Blatt um Blatt  
Nieder vom hohen Akazienbaum.  
Sommer lä<sup>h</sup>chelt erstaunt und matt

In den sterbenden Gartentraum.

Lange noch bei den Rosen  
Bleibt er stehen, sehnt sich nach  
Ruh.  
Langsam tut er die  
Mü<sup>h</sup>degewordenen Augen zu.

### Spring

In darkling caverns  
I dreamed long  
of your trees and azure breezes,  
of your scents and birdsong.

Now you lie revealed  
in glitter and array,  
bathed in light  
like a miracle before me.

You know me again:  
you invite me tenderly.  
There quivers through all my limbs  
your blessed presence.

### September

The garden is in mourning;  
the rain sinks coolly on the flowers,  
summertime shudders  
quietly to its close.

Leaf upon golden leaf is dropping  
down from the tall acacia tree.  
Summer smiles amazed and  
exhausted  
on the dying dream that was this  
garden.

Long by the roses,  
it tarries, yearns for rest,  
slowly closes its  
weary eyes.

### 3. Beim schlafengehen

Nun der Tag mich müd gemacht,  
Soll mein sehnliches Verlangen  
Freundlich die gestirnte Nacht  
Wie ein müdes Kind empfangen.

Hände, lasst von allem Tun,  
Stirn, vergiss du alles Denken,  
Alle meine Sinne nun  
Wollen sich in Schlummer senken.

Und die Seele unbewacht  
Will in freien Flügen schweben,  
Um im Zauberkreis der Nacht  
Tief und tausendfach zu leben.

Hermann Hesse

### 4. Im Abendrot

Wir sind durch Not und Freude  
Gegangen Hand in Hand,  
Vom Wandern ruhen wir

Nun überm stillen Land.

Rings sich die Täler neigen,  
Es dunkelt schon die Luft,  
Zwei Lerchen nur noch steigen  
Nachträumend in den Duft.

Tritt her und lass sie schwirren,  
Bald ist es Schlafenszeit,  
Dass wir uns nicht verirren  
In dieser Einsamkeit.

O weiter, stiller Friede!  
So tief im Abendrot.  
Wie sind wir wandermüde -  
Ist dies etwa der Tod?

Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff

### Going to sleep

Now the day has wearied me:  
let my ardent longing  
the stormy night in friendship  
enfold like a tired child.

Hands, leave all the work;  
brow, forget all thought.  
Now all my senses  
long to sink themselves in slumber.

And the spirit unguarded  
longs to soar on free wings,  
so that, in the magic circle of night,  
it may live deeply, and a  
thousandfold.

### At sunset

Through want and joy we have  
walked hand in hand;  
we are resting from our  
travels  
now, in the quiet countryside.

Around us the valleys fold up,  
already the air grows dark,  
only two larks still soar  
wistfully into the balmy sky.

Come here, and let them fly about;  
soon it is time for sleep.  
We must not go astray  
in this solitude.

O spacious, tranquil peace,  
so profound as the sun sets.  
How tired we are of travelling -  
is this perchance death?

Translations © William Mann, 1966.

## THE FOURTH OF AUGUST

Now in thy splendour go before us,  
Spirit of England, ardent-eyed,  
Enkindle this dear earth that bore us,  
In the hour of peril purified.

The cares we hugged drop out of vision,  
Our hearts with deeper thoughts dilate.  
We step from days of sour division  
Into the grandeur of our fate.

For us the glorious dead have striven,  
They battled that we might be free.  
We to their living cause are given;  
We arm for men that are to be.

Among the nations noblest chartered,  
England recalls her heritage.  
In her is that which is not bartered,  
Which force can neither quell nor cage.

For her immortal stars are burning,  
With her the hope that's never done,  
The seed that's in the Spring's returning,  
The very flower that seeks the sun.

She fights the fraud that deeds desire on  
Lies, in a lust to enslave or kill,  
The barren creed of blood and iron,  
Vampire of Europe's wasted will . . .

Endure, O Earth! and thou, awaken,  
Purged by this dreadful winnowing-fan,  
O wronged, untameable, unshaken  
Soul of divinely suffering man.

Laurence Binyon

## TO WOMEN

Your hearts are lifted up, your hearts  
That have foreknown the utter price.  
Your hearts burn upward like a flame  
Of splendour and of sacrifice.

For you, you too, to battle go,  
Not with the marching drums and cheers  
But in the watch of solitude  
And through the boundless night of fears.

Swift, swifter than those hawks of war,  
Those threatening wings that pulse the air,  
Far as the vanward ranks are set,  
You are gone before them, you are there!

And not a shot comes blind with death  
And not a stab of steel is pressed  
Home, but invisibly it tore  
And entered first a woman's breast.

Amid the thunder of the guns,  
The lightnings of the lance and sword,  
Your hope, your dread, your throbbing pride.  
Your infinite passion is outpoured

From hearts that are as one high heart,  
Withholding naught from doom and bale  
Burningly offered up, - to bleed,  
To bear, to break, but not to fail!

Laurence Binyon

## FOR THE FALLEN

With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,  
England mourns for her dead across the sea.  
Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit,  
Fallen in the cause of the free.

Solemn the drums thrill: Death august and royal  
Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres.  
There is music in the midst of desolation  
And a glory that shines upon our tears.

They went with songs to the battle, they were young,  
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.  
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted,  
They fell with their faces to the foe.

They fought, they were terrible, nought could tame them,  
Hunger, nor legions, nor shattering cannonade.  
They laughed, they sang their melodies of England,  
They fell open-eyed and unafraid.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning  
We will remember them.

They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;  
They sit no more at familiar tables of home;  
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time;  
They sleep beyond England's foam.

But where our desires are and our hopes profound,  
Felt as a well-spring that is hidden from sight,  
To the innermost heart of their own land they are known  
As the stars are known to the Night;

As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,  
Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain,  
As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness,  
To the end, to the end, they remain.

Laurence Binyon