

Sir Bryn Terfel with Britten

Sinfonia

Start time: 8pm

Approximate running time: 60 minutes, no interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change

Programme

Johann Sebastian Bach Cantata No 82, *Ich habe genug*

Gerald Finzi *Let us garlands bring*, Op 18

1. 'Come away, death'
2. 'Who is Silvia?'
3. 'Fear no more the heat o' the sun'
4. 'O mistress mine'
5. 'It was a lover and his lass'

Ivor Novello *I can give you the starlight*, arr Iain Farrington

Welsh Traditional Song *Ar hyd y nos*, arr Chris Hazell

Ivor Novello *My dearest dear*, arr Iain Farrington

Welsh Traditional Song *Ar lan y môr*, arr Bryan Davies/Chris Hazell/Iain Farrington

Ivor Novello *Keep the home fires burning*, arr Iain Farrington

Harriet Smith dives deeper into Sir Bryn Terfel's programme.

Among the many extraordinary achievements of J S Bach, one of the most remarkable is the prodigious number of cantatas he produced for services at St Thomas's Church in Leipzig, where he was in charge of music from 1723 until his death in 1750. There isn't a dud among the near 200 that have come down to us, though some have inevitably risen to the surface to gain a life outside their original sacred context. No 82, *Ich habe genug* ('It is enough'), written in 1727, is one such and it's not difficult to appreciate why: no religious leanings are needed to experience the intensity of emotion conveyed within it. Bach knew he'd hit gold and reworked it several times but the best-known is that for bass, supported by obbligato oboe and strings, the natural weightiness of the voice perfectly conveying the seriousness of the subject matter, in which the believer sings of a weariness of the world and a longing for the hereafter.

In Lutheranism the image of dying being depicted as falling asleep is a popular device, and nowhere is that more searingly conjured than in the cantata's central aria 'Schlummert ein' (Close in sleep, you weary eyes). This forms the heart of a cantata that couldn't be simpler structurally, with no choruses or chorales, just five movements, three arias interspersed with two recitatives. The work begins in an elegiac mood, with an aria expressing readiness for death, voice and oboe intertwining with great poignancy. This is reinforced in the two recitatives, in which the protagonist emphasises his readiness for death. The final aria is a dancing affirmation of faith, somehow ebullient despite its minor-key tonality.

Why is it that Gerald Finzi is still relatively underrated? Could it be that he was just out of kilter with musical fashions of his time, his gift being one of intense lyricism? He offered *Let us garlands bring* – a sequence of five settings of Shakespeare – as a birthday present for his friend Ralph Vaughan Williams whose 70th birthday fell on 12 October 1942. He originally wrote them for baritone and piano, but soon after orchestrated them, the version we hear tonight.

Garlands brings together pre-existing songs, the earliest 'Fear no more' forming an elegiac and heartfelt centrepiece to the cycle. It comes from *Cymbeline* and talks of time as a great leveller. In the opening song, 'Come away, death' (*Twelfth Night*), Finzi emphasises the word 'death' with deliberate dissonances but there's also a folk-like quality to much of the vocal writing. Matters are lightened in 'Who is Silvia?' from Shakespeare's early play *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, while the fourth, 'O mistress mine', also from *Twelfth Night*, is set on its way by a tripping, gently strummed backdrop, the vocal line initially light-hearted, though Finzi finds unexpected intensity in the last two lines of each verse. The final song sets an evergreen text from *As you like it* – 'It was a lover and his lass' – with the composer responding with a buoyantly syncopated energy.

Bryn Terfel turns to his beloved Wales for the remainder of the programme, interspersing traditional melodies with three songs by Ivor Novello. Two numbers come from *The Dancing Years*, which was unveiled in a lavish production in London's Drury Lane in 1939. The Cardiff-born all-rounder designed it as a vehicle for his own acting skills, taking

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the male lead, Rudi, a poor Jewish composer in a complex love triangle between Maria the opera singer and Grete, the innkeeper's daughter. The work's backdrop of Nazi persecution gave it a terrible relevance to audiences during the Second World War and it was hugely successful. 'I can give you the starlight' was originally sung by Maria in which she relates how love has transformed her from self-absorption to generosity. 'My dearest dear' is introduced by Novello as Rudi and then sung in response by Maria, and closes with the words of hope: 'A little waiting and you'll reach my heart'.

'Keep the home fires burning', which like the other two Novello numbers has been arranged by Iain Farrington, was written in 1914 at a time when it was still hoped the First World War would be over in a matter of months. It was very much designed to rouse patriotic thoughts among both volunteer soldiers and those left at home, its text by the American poet Lena Guilbert Ford shamelessly milking the emotions.

Of *Ar hyd y nos* ('All through the night'), orchestrator Chris Hazell has written: 'This has a wonderful simplicity and calm wherever it is played or sung, regardless of the word setting in Welsh, English or any other language for that matter. It is this very simplicity which guided me in making this arrangement. The song speaks for itself, and all I needed to do was add a little support.'

Ar lan y môr ('On the seashore') is a lament addressed to the poet's sweetheart. The simplest but most haunting of folk melodies has proved a gift to arrangers down the ages, offering opportunities for harmonies and orchestration that are ever fresh, as Chris Hazell and Bryan Davies amply demonstrate.

Performers

Sir Bryn Terfel bass-baritone

Iain Farrington piano

Britten Sinfonia

Jacqueline Shave leader

Nicholas Daniel oboe

Myfanwy Price oboe

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