

**ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS CHORAL SOCIETY**

**83RD SEASON**

**ASSEMBLY HALL, TUNBRIDGE WELLS**

**SUNDAY 29th MARCH 1987**

**at 3.00 p.m.**

# **THE KINGDOM**

**Edward Elgar**

**1857-1934**

Jennifer Offord. Soprano.

Elizabeth Castle. Contralto.

Neville Williams. Tenor.

Anthony Michaels-Moore. Baritone.

Orchestra led by Jane Pamment.

**CONDUCTED by DEREK WATMOUGH**

Programme 30p.

JENNIFER OFFORD (soprano) was born in Zimbabwe of English parents. Whilst in Zimbabwe, she studied at the College of Music in Harare, and completed teacher's and performer's LRSM diplomas in piano and singing.

After performing as a soloist in recital and oratorio, Miss Offord was granted an Ernest Oppenheimer Memorial Bursary by the Anglo-American Corporation, to study in England for three (extended to four) years and came to London.

Miss Offord has sung in Mozart and Puccini opera: most recently, Suor Angelica with the Beaufort Opera Company in Kensington.

ELIZABETH CASTLE (contralto) was born in Cheshire and studied first at the Royal Manchester College of Music and afterwards at the Royal Academy of Music, London. She has a degree in Music and several diplomas.

Miss Castle has sung with Florence Opera Company, Welsh National Opera Company and London Opera Group. Her busy career includes concert and oratorio performances throughout the United Kingdom. Amongst many memorable occasions she sang at Isobel Baillie's 81st Birthday Concert at the Wigmore Hall. She has also sung in many different countries and has appeared on television.

NEVILLE WILLIAMS (tenor) studied at Cardiff College of Music and the London Opera Centre, sang principal roles with Welsh National Opera and the English Opera Company and English Music Theatre. He has sung oratorio at St. John's Smith Square, London and at Chichester.

ANTHONY MICHAELS-MOORE (baritone) was a finalist in the 1985 Scottish Opera International Prize, and later that year became the first British singer to win the Luciano Pavarotti/Opera Company of Philadelphia Vocal Competition. As a result of this victory he will sing with the Philadelphia Opera Company shortly.

This season his roles with Opera North include Marcello in 'La Boheme', the Messenger in 'Oedipus Rex' and Figaro in 'The Barber of Seville'. Next season he sings Escamillo in a new production of 'Carmen' by Stefanos Lazaridis for Opera North, after which he joins the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, as principal baritone.

## THE KINGDOM

By 1906 Elgar was in receipt of public recognition, and having been knighted in 1904, also of royal approval. His most popular works included "The Dream of Gerontius" and "The Enigma Variations" which were frequently performed in this country and abroad, especially in Germany. A devout Roman Catholic born and bred Elgar had long cherished the dream of a trilogy of religious oratorios based on the growth and spread of Christianity and his notebooks show ideas sketched over a period of several years. "The Apostles" 1904 was the first part and during the following two years despite ill health Elgar worked on the next part called "The Kingdom" the first performance of which took place in Birmingham in 1906. The projected final oratorio was never written.

Elgar selected texts from the Bible adding linking narration to show how the Kingdom of Heaven would come upon earth through the work of priests of the early Church in spreading the gospel by healing and teaching. The music itself rises above the constraints of creed and dogma to convey this universal message and could only have been written by Elgar, a true Romantic. There is magnificence in much of the choral writing and the lush orchestration conveys the moods and excitement by its exact scoring, whether with augmented brass or reduced strings.

### P R E L U D E

The orchestral prelude opens majestically with a rising crescendo and subtle changes of harmony. In Wagnerian manner motto themes are introduced which will reappear through the oratorio to represent various ideas. The most unmistakable is the noble melody of the New Faith with its ascending triplets which both Peter and John sing.

## **PART 1**

### **IN THE UPPER ROOM**

The Apostles and Holy women gather in an upper room after the Ascension to discuss past events and elect Matthew to replace Judas as one of the Twelve. The prelude dies away and soloists and chorus open unaccompanied which emphasises the brightness of the texture. The orchestra echoes a traditional plainchant melody "O Sacrum Convivium" while the Apostles contemplate Jesus' sayings. Moods change frequently becoming more dramatic at "The Light of the World", then simple and tranquil before merging into a fugue "O Praise the Name". Lots are cast and the soloists declare Matthew is chosen of the Lord and the chorus continues with a flowing melody in triplets leading to the climax of the movement "O Ye Priests". Chords are almost hammered out and a noble theme emerges. The sopranos' song in praise of the messengers of the Lord soars to the heavens before the movement ends in great peace and harmony.

## **PART 2**

### **AT THE BEAUTIFUL GATE**

This is set outside the temple on the morning of Pentecost with the lame man waiting for alms and the two Marys looking on in pity. The orchestra opens peacefully and with gracious simplicity as the soprano and contralto soloists tell of the preparations being made for worship inside the temple. Scoring is delicate including a harp, strings, woodwind, horns but no other brass and the music of the Temple Singers from The Apostles accompanies the soloists.

## **PART 3**

### **PENTECOST**

The central movement depicts how the Disciples receive the Holy Spirit or Comforter in the upper room and then go forth to preach the word to the astonished multi-tongued crowd outside the temple. Elgar's ability to use the orchestra to colour the text is shown to full effect especially the mighty wind depicted by the brass and woodwind. A mystic chorus of women's voices recites a blessing as the Disciples go out to prophesy. A fugal chorus with angular counter subjects and interjections from the brass as the crowd wonders why everyone can understand the speech of the Galileans "What meaneth this?"

The bass soloist, Peter, solemnly tells how the Holy Spirit has come upon them, accompanied in the orchestra by the New Faith theme heard in the prelude. He preaches Christ crucified and the crowd realises with sorrow what they had done "His blood be on us" and in a chorus of rising intensity and drama they and the soloists seek repentance "In the name of Jesus Christ". The movement ends in a luscious climax (echoes of Gerontius) with the New Faith theme in the orchestra.

#### **PART 4**

#### **THE SIGN OF HEALING**

This takes place at the Beautiful Gate where the lame man is healed by Peter and John, their subsequent arrest and Mary's prayer in benediction. The opening sets the varying moods of passion and tranquility and the contralto and bass soloists relate the healing. The crowd watches in amazement and Peter and John explain in a powerful aria that faith in Jesus Christ brought this about. The mood hardens as the contralto describes the arrest of the Disciples. The remainder of the movement is a soliloquy for soprano (Mary) "The sun goeth down" which incorporates two Hebrew melodies adding oriental richness to Elgar's own. The orchestration adds poignancy to the words and the climax comes with Mary's soaring aria "The Gospel of the Kingdom" merging with the "Beatitudes" theme from "The Apostles" before ending gently.

#### **PART 5**

#### **THE UPPER ROOM**

Peter and John have been released from prison but forbidden to preach. Together with the other Disciples and the Holy women they celebrate the breaking of bread concluding with the Lord's Prayer. The chorus sing a hymn of praise and the Disciples describe what happened at their arrest and the others comment "Lord, Thou didst make the heav'n". The straightforward writing expresses praise and leads to the most important part of the movement celebrating the Eucharist in which soloists and chorus join together in "Thou Almighty Lord". This solemn section ends with the singing of The Lord's Prayer and the New Faith theme as the Disciples commend themselves to God and the work ends peacefully.

