

Saturday 7th May 1994 at 7.30 pm
in St James's Church, Staveley

J S BACH
Antonio BONONCINI
John BLOW

Staveley Choral Society
with an invited orchestra
led by Jenny Hewitt-Jones

and soloists
Joyce Hartley
Margaret Pattinson
Roger Cann
Nigel Waugh

ADMISSION £4

The three items in the programme constitute a cross-section of music written round about the year 1700, drawn from three different nationalities, and of a contrasting nature.

“Begin The Song” by John Blow (1649-1708) is a secular work for the celebration of St. Cecilia’s Day in 1684. The words are by John Oldham.

Blow spent most of his life in church music, spending some time as organist of Westminster Abbey, and preceding Purcell in that post. He was equally at home with non-religious music, as this piece shows. It is written for S.A.T.B. soloists, chorus and string orchestra. Originally, a counter-tenor would have sung the alto part. As a full, though small-scale work, it has an orchestral introduction, followed by eight movements with singing. There is a consistent pattern of a solo verse leading to a chorus based on the same theme, but some movements are for solo voices only.

The harmonic development has few surprises, but some of the rhythms are complex and unexpected. Listen out in particular for number 4, a duet between alto and tenor, which is over a ground bass: a repeated phrase in the bass. It is, overall, an attractive and elegant piece, and an invocation to music, with which we start our concert.

Stabat Mater Antonio Bononcini (1675-1726)

This piece is by the lesser known of two brothers. The elder Bononcini travelled widely in Europe, and was considered a rival to Handel. Antonio stayed mostly in Italy, his home country, and certainly wrote at least six operas. The Stabat Mater is, however, a religious work, depicting Mary's grief at the crucifixion of her son. It represents perhaps the most solemn and moving moment on which the Christian faith is based.

The piece is scored for the same resources as the John Blow. We sing it in Latin, but a translation is provided. The orchestral parts add a lot of colour to the piece, providing mood and contrast. There are obligato passages to most of the solos, intertwining violin parts which run in counterpart to the solo voice. The whole piece is a miniature, solemn drama in music.

Jesu, Priceless Treasure J S Bach (1685-1750)

This is one of several religious motets by Bach, but the only one scored for five voices; there are two soprano parts. The work was written for a funeral or a memorial service for Frau Reese in 1723, and is therefore one of the earliest pieces Bach wrote following his appointment to St. Thomas' Church and School in Leipzig. He has used the traditional funeral chorale, and has interspersed these verses with words from The Epistle to the Romans, acting as a commentary. The solemn and noble tune is treated in a rich variety of ways, but every verse is elegant and dignified. Normally, the whole piece is choral, with no solos. For variety, tonight's performance features our soloists in three of the movements. The orchestral parts are also a later addition. The motet would have been usually sung unaccompanied, or simply with a keyboard accompaniment.

All three of tonight's works are masterpieces in miniature, but this last piece ranks with the finest choral music of all time, timeless in its beauty.