

# ORATORIO

RTHK Radio 4  
10:00 – 11:00

Programme 1  
Sunday 6 May 2007

**MUSIC:** Handel: Joshua, Introd.      98 R 07 Disc 1: #1      c. 0:25

**KANE:** Hello: I'm Ciaran Kane, and I welcome you to stay with me now for the first in a short series of weekly *Oratorios*. The signature music is Handel, *and* from an oratorio of his, but I'm afraid (partly due to *time* constraints), we won't be having his "Messiah" or any of the more 'famous' oratorios in this series. Instead, it's a number of *lesser-known* oratorios or music-dramas that I'll be presenting over the coming weeks. Mostly they'll be edited to fit our time-slot, but sometimes there may be items from different, smaller compositions too. And we're taking the term 'oratorio' in a *wide* sense, not strictly limited to *biblical* stories and religious subjects as such. For instance, today's choice, an Oratorio called "Dewi Sant" (or 'St David'), based on the life and character of the patron saint of Wales. This was written as an Oratorio for three solo voices, chorus and orchestra in 1951, commissioned as part of that year's Festival of Britain. It was first performed in St David's Cathedral, Pembrokeshire, in that July. The composer was Arwel Hughes, and this was his first large-scale work of this kind. He's also left two operas, a symphony, some string quartets, a Mass and an amount of other choral and orchestral music. Hughes had a long and busy career with the British Broadcasting Corporation, and also actively promoted the music of his younger Welsh contemporaries like Alun Hoddinott and William Mathias. The libretto for "Dewi Sant" was written, in Welsh, by a close friend and colleague of Hughes at the BBC, the writer and poet Aneurin Talfan Davies. His text was derived from an 11<sup>th</sup> century traditional 'Life' of David, who was a 6<sup>th</sup> century monk, nick-named 'The Waterman' for his habit of recommending copious use of water, for both drinking and washing. He is reputed to've been ordained a bishop in Jerusalem; and he established the Welsh diocese of St David's. His cult remained strong and widespread for many centuries, and his festival day, 1<sup>st</sup> March, the date of his death in 588, became the national day.

In the Oratorio, the librettist highlights the character and personality of David rather than the legends and stories of his life. We'll be listening to the *English* version of the work, also done by the same librettist. "Dewi Sant" is performed on this recording by the BBC Welsh Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, with Yvonne Kenny (soprano), Martyn Hill (tenor) and David Wilson-Johnson (bass), all conducted by the composer's son, Owain Arwel Hughes. It begins with a choral hymn of praise, "Praise the Lord for all his saints; praise the Lord for David our patron".

**MUSIC:** Hughes --- Dewi Sant 96 R 26 # 1 5:58

**KANE:** The opening chorus of Arwel Hughes' Oratorio, 'Dewi Sant'. The next section pictures the people appealing for St Patrick to come serve them, and how Patrick did come to Vallis Rosina and promise to stay. But an angel tells him this is not *his* place; it's destined for another who will come 30 years later. Meanwhile Patrick must go to Ireland.

**MUSIC:** s a m e # 2 stop at 7:15

**KANE:** So, thirty years later, miracles surround the birth of David, and his destiny is foretold. "Sweet as honey shall his voice resound through hill and valley".

**MUSIC:** s a m e #2 continue: stop at 11:30 4:15

**KANE:** When David and his disciples arrive at Vallis Rosina, they are opposed by Boia, a pagan Irish chieftain. David speaks to him about God the creator and the only Son He sent as redeemer, and about the faith and healing this Son has brought. Boia eventually accepts the faith, and David settles in Vallis Rosina where he builds the Lord's house and lives his life as witness, 'a help to the needy and friend to the lonely; a father to the faithful'.

**MUSIC:** s a m e # 2 continue > # 3 ..... fade/stop at 6:00 8:25

**KANE:** The story now skips to the end of David's life. Advanced in years, he has a great longing to be with the saints in the glory of Jesus. He prays for the Lord's coming; and an angel chorus calls to him to come into light and glory. He's told to be prepared; and his disciples are told that on 1<sup>st</sup> March Jesus will come to take their father to where there will be glory eternal.

**MUSIC:** s a m e # 3 continue > # 4 11:13

**KANE:** The next section of Arwel Hughes' Oratorio, Dewi Sant, is about St David's last Sunday, when he addressed his people and gave them his blessing. He told them he was about to "go the way my fathers trod", encouraged them to be joyful and keep the faith, and to imitate his witnessing. Then he said farewell. For reasons of time, I'm omitting this section which is over 13 minutes long, and going directly to the Wednesday, 1<sup>st</sup> March, when "the city was filled with hosts of angels and heavenly music and perfume".

**MUSIC: s a m e # 6 7:23**

**KANE:** The final section of the oratorio depicts David's funeral Mass, with the singing of Kyrie Eleison, Christe Eleison, and the verses of "Eternal rest grant to them O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them", "Requiem aeternam". This section, also, I'm having to cut short, skipping to the concluding chorus addressed to David, "O blessed David, plead for us now. Pray for us, O pray for our land".

**MUSIC: s a m e # 7 starting at 9:31 1:16**

**KANE:** You've been listening to "Dewi Sant", an oratorio for 3 soloists, chorus and orchestra, about St David, the patron of Wales. The composer was Arwel Hughes, and the recording was conducted by his son, Owain Arwel Hughes, with soloists Yvonne Kenny, Martyn Hill, and David Wilson-Johnson, and the BBC Welsh Symphony Orchestra and Chorus. Next week, "The Light of Life" by Edward Elgar.

Music: 46:05

Words: 909