

ORATORIO

RTHK Radio 4
10:00 – 11:00

Programme 6
Sunday 10 June 2007

MUSIC: Sullivan -- The Prodigal Son CD 63618 # # 1 – 3 12:11
[KANE: v.o. at c. 0:36

Welcome to “ORATORIO”; and *this* week a return to the more *traditional* style of oratorio, inspired by Handel, that reached the height of its popularity in Victorian Britain in the late 1800s. Arthur Sullivan is *far* better known as the *musical* half of the Gilbert & Sullivan phenomenon that produced a whole string of highly successful light operas between 1871 and 1896. But Sullivan had loftier ambitions, which were never really fulfilled: his only grand-opera, ‘Ivanhoe’, failed though it did have a run of 160 London performances, and was produced also in Boston and Berlin. He *first* made his name at the age of 20 with incidental music for Shakespeare’s “The Tempest”. He was still in his 20s when he wrote his first oratorio, for the Worcester festival of 1869, “The Prodigal Son”. It was a great success, and continued to be performed regularly until the First World War, when changing tastes and sensibilities led to its falling out of favour. Two more oratorios followed: “The Light of the World” and “The Martyr of Antioch” which Sullivan later revised as an opera. Indeed, it was Sullivan’s introduction of an operatic, dramatic element of human emotion and local colour into oratorio that moved the genre onwards from Handel and Mendelssohn. “The Prodigal Son” is our oratorio for this week and you’re listening to its Introduction. Unusually for him, it was Sullivan himself who chose the words, basically the story in St Luke’s gospel ch.15, but omitting the episode of the *elder* son, which Sullivan found irrelevant to his focus on the young man and his father, the tenor and baritone who have the best solo parts. He then “filled out” the story (as he said) with *other* biblical quotes. Once more, for reasons of time, we have to omit a few numbers in ‘The Prodigal Son’, mostly from those *other* biblical quotes. **[12;11]**

soprano), Mark Wilde (tenor) and Garry Magee (baritone). The New London Orchestra and the London Chorus were conducted by Ronald Corp. I'm Ciaran Kane: join me again next week for another 'Oratorio'.

Music: 49:53

Words: 340