

# ORATORIO again

RTHK Radio 4  
10:00 – 11:00

Programme 6  
Sunday 11 January 2009

**MUSIC:** McCartney --- Liverpool Oratorio CD 15493 disc 1 # 15 c. 0:21

**KANE:** V.O. Welcome to another “Oratorio” programme, with me Ciaran Kane. My choice today is a rather *different* kind of oratorio, one that *doesn't* have a biblical or religious theme, a ‘secular’ oratorio, if you like. Its *composer calls* it “Liverpool Oratorio” : and he’s the former ‘Beatle’ and native of Liverpool, Paul McCartney. It was written in collaboration with the American composer and conductor Carl Davis. **[music out]** When the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, one of the world’s oldest, was preparing to celebrate its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1990, they commissioned McCartney to write something for the occasion. It was the perfect excuse, he says, for him to expand his previous flirtatious excursions into the orchestral and choral worlds into a full-blown ‘classical’ piece, his first. “Hopefully”, he wrote, “the combination of Carl’s classical training and my primitivism will result in a beautiful piece of music”. The Liverpool Oratorio tells the story of Shanty, a young man born in the city in wartime, his schooldays, his parents, his meeting the girl of his dreams, Mary Dee, his wedding and his working life. It’s a close parallel to McCartney’s own early life. The work was first performed in 1991 and recorded in Liverpool Cathedral, where McCartney had auditioned for the cathedral choir at the age of 11 but was turned down. What if he hadn’t been ? In this recording, tenor Jerry Hadley sings the part of Shanty, and soprano Dame Kiri te Kanawa the part of Mary Dee. ‘Liverpool Oratorio’ is in eight movements, beginning with ‘War’ in 1942 and then “School’ in 1953. Like with other oratorios too long to fit into our time-slot, I’m having to edit and omit some of the numbers in this work too. After an orchestral introduction, a boy solo and then boys’ choir sing in latin a few lines that repeat throughout the work, ‘we are born not for ourselves alone but for the whole world’. Then Shanty recalls his summer birth and a new hope.

[330]



**KANE:** Inevitably comes a crisis, and more than *one* crisis. “Crises” is the *title* of movement seven. Mary Dee is alone at home, singing to her unborn child about the world he or she will enter. After a drink or two with a colleague, Shanty comes home demanding where’s his dinner.... It’s goodbye to romance and gentleness. A *row* between them develops, and accusations. Then, roused to anger, Mary Dee announces she’s leaving, saying to Shanty “Oh, and by the way... you’re about to become a father”. She dashes out of the house, into the street, and collapses [ 97 ]

**MUSIC:** **a s a b o v e** **disc 2 ## 12, 14 – 17 fade #17 at c. 0:24**  
**Timing 6:55**

**KANE:** Mary Dee’s been taken to hospital, in a serious condition; there are fears for the baby: a nurse sings to comfort and console her, there is nothing more for her to do but to sleep [ 35 ]

**MUSIC:** **a s a b o v e** **disc 2 # 19** **fade under at 3:10**

**KANE:** **V.O. (music s l o w fade-out)** But her sleep is disturbed by those ghosts of the past that she hears again in her dreams, wanting to take the child from her. Mary Dee cries out and strongly resists. Shanty too comes to fight for her, and, reconciled, together again, they save the child. [ 48 ]

**MUSIC:** **a s a b o v e** **disc 2 # 20 (start at 1:54), # 21** **4:30**

**KANE:** The last movement of Paul McCartney’s “Liverpool Oratorio” is titled ‘Peace’. Shanty recalls his child’s birth on a winter morning, giving him too a new birth, against the same chant that began the oratorio, “not merely for ourselves but for the whole world are we born”. And the chorus sings “God is good” [ 53 ]

**MUSIC:** **a s a b o v e** **disc 2 # 22** **1:22**  
**# 23** **fade out at 1:09**

**KANE:** “What people want is a family life”, the preacher says, even though it isn’t always easy, and there are conflicts and disagreements. Shanty and Mary Dee are reconciled, and their love survives in the ordinary day to day. [ 38 ]

**MUSIC:** **a s a b o v e** **disc 2 # 25 fade in at 1:11**  
**# 26 cut at 0:39** **Timing 2:41**

**KANE:** You've been listening to Liverpool Oratorio, by Paul McCartney. The role of Mary Dee was sung by Dame Kiri te Kanawa, and Shanty by Jerry Hadley. The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir and Choristers of Liverpool Cathedral, were conducted by Carl Davis. [ 47 ]

**Words: 945 Music timings: 45:51**