

## What Sweeter Music: John Rutter

RTHK Radio 4  
Tues.

Programme: 1  
6 november 2007

**MUSIC:** What Sweeter Music      04 X 04 # 17      fade under at 0:35....  
(out before 1:02)

**KANE:(V.O.)** “What Sweeter Music can we bring than a *carol* for to sing the birth of this our heavenly King” : a Christmas carol by contemporary English composer John Rutter, introducing a series of *eight* programmes of his music. Rutter first made his *mark* as a composer of fresh and tuneful carols and anthems, but he has more *substantial* work to his credit as well. These eight programmes will feature *all* of his major recorded compositions. Some of his orchestral and instrumental work, and some non-*sacred* songs will also feature; and in *each* programme, one or two of the anthems and carols or sacred music that his name’s most associated with, in the mainstream of his writing. Born in London in 1945, John Rutter had a very good musical education at *school* as a chorister and teenage organist:. Among his schoolmates was the composer John Tavener who’s made *his* name in sacred music in the traditions of the eastern orthodox churches. Up at Cambridge, at Clare College, Rutter came to know David Willcocks, of King’s College, one of the *foremost* choral directors of the day in England. It was for the famous Christmastime King’s College Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, in 1987, that Rutter wrote “What Sweeter Music”. The *words* are from a longer poem of 17<sup>th</sup> century English poet Robert Herrick, and Rutter has commented that they “seem to sum up the whole ethos of the carol genre as many composers and poets have understood it.”

**MUSIC:** What Sweeter Music      04 X 04 # 17      4:18

**KANE:** The Cambridge Singers, with John Rutter’s 1987 carol, ‘What Sweeter Music’; providing also the *title* for this *series* of eight programmes of his music. Childhood memories and delight are behind Rutter’s devotion to the Christmas carol; his schooling and university exposure to the tradition of English church choral music

gave him his love for the genre of *sacred* music, and his desire to make it more accessible for singers and audiences today. Most of his church music has been written in response to commissions and requests. Besides the *major* texts, he's made settings of *various* church *anthems*, also setting to music a number of old English religious poems and other such texts. One that's become a favourite is *Rutter's* version of "Be Thou My Vision", a versification of an English translation of an 8<sup>th</sup> century Irish monastic text. The Cambridge Singers again.

**MUSIC: Be Thou My Vision 94 R 15 # 2 4:12**

**KANE:** "Be Thou my Vision", by John Rutter, recorded in 1989. One of Rutter's first *major* sacred compositions, and his first *international* success was his "Gloria". This was commissioned by the Voices of Mel Olson, of Omaha, Nebraska, in the United States. The composer himself directed its first performance, in May 1974, on his first U.S. visit. The setting of the old latin liturgical text is based on one of the Gregorian chants associated with the hymn. Like a *number* of Rutter's sacred works, his 'Gloria' was written as a *concert* piece, scored for brass ensemble, with timpani, percussion and organ. In this recording, the composer conducts the City of London Sinfonia, with the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble and the Cambridge Singers.

**MUSIC: Gloria 91 R 15 ## 1 – 3 17:10**

**KANE:** What its composer called making "quite a joyful noise unto the Lord", ----- John Rutter's "Gloria". And you're listening to the first of a *series* of programmes of his music. The year before 'Gloria', in 1973, Rutter produced his "Five Childhood Lyrics", for unaccompanied choir. He chose the *texts* from his memories of early childhood verses and rhymes, setting them to simple music as a kind of homage to the world of children. The famous Edward Lear poem "The Owl and the Pussy-cat", and Robert Louis Stevenson's "Windy Nights" join three traditional English children's rhymes, 'Monday's Child', 'Matthew, Mark, Luke and John', and 'Sing a song of sixpence'.

**MUSIC: 5 Childhood Lyrics CD 20514 ## 13 – 17 9:25**

**KANE:** 5 Childhood Lyrics by John Rutter. Over the years, Rutter's kept up his association with his *alma mater*, Clare College, and written not a few pieces for the college and its choir. One of these, written in 1998, is a celebration of *music itself*, "Musica Dei Donum", an anthem for choir and flute. It's a setting of a *latin* text, *only* known from a *previous* setting of it by Roland de Lassus in 1594. 'Music, the gift of the supreme God, draws men, draws gods; music makes savage souls gentle and uplifts sad minds; music moves the very trees and wild beasts'.

**MUSIC: Musica Dei Donum                      Naxos 8.557130 # 10                      5:50**

**KANE:** Paul McCartney included *that* John Rutter anthem, 'Musica Dei Donum' in *his* 1999 memorial collection of nine anthems "A Garland for Linda". In that *recording* of it you heard the choir of Clare College, Cambridge, with flautist Karen Jones. Rutter makes a *point* of choosing with *great* deliberation the *texts* that he'll put to music. He's written his *own* words for *most* of his carols, and has a fondness for *older* English poetry and verses. But for *one* of his *most* popular anthems the words aren't *that* old: and neither is he the first to put them to *music*. "For the Beauty of the Earth" comes (slightly adapted) from three verses from longer lyrics by 19<sup>th</sup> / early 20<sup>th</sup> century English writer, F.S. Pierpoint. Rutter's accompaniment to this was originally *piano*. But he loves orchestrating, and though he often writes a *keyboard* accompaniment for his anthems, he *also* writes and much prefers an orchestral version. This was recorded in 1983.

**MUSIC: For the Beauty of the Earth                      91 R 15 # 8                      3:37**

**KANE:** 'For the Beauty of the Earth', one of John Rutter's most attractive and popular sacred songs, now sung in *various* shapes and forms by choirs and groups all over the English-speaking world. It vindicates his own sentiment that "there's no reason not to enjoy church music outside of church"

**MUSIC: What Sweeter Music                      04 X 04 # 17 pre-faded to end at 53'**

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total music: 45:07    total words 929 (c. 7')