

What Sweeter Music: John Rutter

RTHK Radio 4
Tues. 19:00 – 20:00

Programme: 3
20 november 2007

MUSIC: What Sweeter Music 04x04 # 17 c. 0:35 >> fade on cue....

KANE: Welcome again to the music of John Rutter, with me Ciaran Kane, in this *series* of programmes, “What Sweeter Music”. The *title* comes from one of Rutter’s signature *Christmas* carols, which (in the eyes of a BBC *Music* Magazine writer) have made him “... the most successful and well-known composer of choral music in recent British history”. Be *that* as it may : Rutter *certainly* has had a *notable* influence on the English-language choir *repertoire*. But he’s *not* always been so well *received*, especially in his native England ----- he’s *been* more *popular* in north America. In the eyes of *not a few* in the traditional world of cathedral sacred music, in choirs and churches, he’s not *serious* enough. He’s not considered as in the same *league* as Arvo Pärt and other admired contemporary composers of church music. He’s been dismissed as *lightweight*, too *facile*. Some say he’s too close to ‘pop’ music and song, too saccharine sweet, even cloying. Rutter’s easy fluency and tunefulness, his composition *style*, have even allowed the distain of a harsh comment once heard from a choir member when a new piece of his was being introduced:

“... more Rutter ubbish”. Whatever the *fairness* or accuracy of *any of that*, Rutter has in fact produced a *number* of major serious works, at least *one* of which has become a modern “classic” of choral church music, his “Requiem”. And that’s the *main* work in this programme, taking most of our time today. But *before* saying more about it, and *listening* to it, here’s a shorter *anthem* by Rutter, showing *another* of his gifts ----- his ability with *words* and poetic expression. The *text* for “Look at the world” is Rutter’s *own*, written in 1996. It’s about environment, thankfulness and praise, and is full of the kind of infectious *joy* that’s specially notable in his carols.

MUSIC: Look at the World CSCD 514 # 12 4:31

KANE: John Rutter's "Look at the World". The composer's most successful large-scale work to date has been his "Requiem" of 1985, which immediately caught attention. Its first performance was at the United Methodist Church, Dallas, Texas, with Rutter himself conducting. Within six months it already had over 500 performances in north America alone. And in the aftermath of the 11th September 2001, *Rutter's* 'Requiem' was the favoured choice of music for many of the memorial services held throughout the United States. Perhaps that was because of its feeling of consolation, peacefulness, hope in the face of tragedy and loss. Rutter's own father had died the year before he *wrote* the Requiem, and the composer wanted his work to be in a language that his father "might have enjoyed listening to", and be (as he said) "a requiem of our time". He wanted it suitable for both church service and concert-hall, and so produced a chamber arrangement as well as the orchestral version. A couple of years *before*, Rutter had gone to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris to examine there the recently uncovered manuscript of Gabriel Fauré's often revised "Requiem" of some hundred years previously. That resulted in his publishing a new reconstructed edition of Fauré's work, which has since become the standard version of that very popular 'Requiem'. Inspired and influenced by Fauré, Rutter's Requiem does *not* keep strictly to the latin liturgical *Missa Pro Defunctis* (Mass for the Dead). Like Fauré, he omits the long *Dies Irae* poem that gave such dramatic scope to composers of earlier large-scale Requiems, keeping just the last few words, Pie Jesu, as a separate section. In the *Agnus Dei* and the concluding *Lux Aeterna* sections, Rutter added some *personal* selections from the Burial Service in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. He added, as well, two psalms, "Out of the Deep" (ps 130) and "The Lord is my shepherd" (ps 23), as the second and the second-*last* sections of his Requiem, and this gave the work a strong structural balance and a new spiritual resonance. Like the *Libera Me* in Fauré's Requiem, Rutter's Ps 23 had existed separately for some years, before finding its perfect place in the Requiem.

MUSIC: Requiem **Naxos 8.557130 ## 1 – 7** **34:24**

KANE: “Requiem”, by John Rutter, sung by the Choir of Clare College, Cambridge, with members of the City of London Sinfonia and Elin Manahan Thomas, soprano, directed by Timothy Brown. That *recording* of it, in the *chamber* version, was made in 2002 at Douai Abbey in England and dedicated to the memory of Rutter’s son, Christopher. *He’d* been killed in a road accident the previous year, during his first year at Clare College. The Requiem’s mood of hope and comforting *allow* it to be followed by *another* Rutter piece that might *otherwise* seem to clash with the sombreness of a Requiem, “I Believe in Springtime”. In feeling and content rather like the piece we heard earlier, this is a joyful celebration of life, written in a simple style for a children’s choir, originally with piano accompaniment. The verse words are again Rutter’s *own*, and the recording was made in 1989.

MUSIC: I believe in Springtime **CSCD 514 # 16** **3:02**

KANE: “I believe in Springtime”, by John Rutter. And finally today, one of his earlier and most popular *short* pieces. He’s written a *number* of ‘blessings’: this is the lovely text from the biblical Book of Numbers, ch.6, “The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you”. The recording is from 1983.

MUSIC: The Lord Bless you and Keep you **CSCD 514 # 21** **2:39**

KANE: The biblical blessing, ‘The Lord Bless you and keep you’, in the gentle setting by John Rutter which has become so popular and well-loved around the world. And it’s a fitting place to end *this* programme in the series “What Sweeter Music” ----- the music-making of John Rutter.

MUSIC: What Sweeter Music **04 X 04 # 17** **pre-fade to end**
programme at 53:00

music timing 45:11 total words 929 (c. 7')