

What Sweeter Music: John Rutter

RTHK Radio 4
Tues. 19:00 – 20:00

Programme: 4
27 november 2007

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

KANE: Hello again. I'm Ciaran Kane with *another* programme of music by John Rutter in the series, 'What Sweeter Music'. This time, we've *two* rather long items, one of them instrumental, plus a typical Rutter psalm-setting, and another blessing-anthem that's become one of his most-loved short pieces, both for its words and their setting. We start with Ps 100, "O be joyful in the Lord", dating from the 1980s: this *recording* is from 1989, in what Rutter calls the "more colourful" form of his alternate *orchestral* arrangement --- as a commission for church service, the original accompaniment was keyboard only; but it sounds much more festively joyful *this way*.

MUSIC: O Be Joyful in the Lord CSCD 514 # 6 3:17

KANE: Ps 100: 'O Be joyful in the Lord', in John Rutter's setting. Given his choral and collegiate background, it's no surprise that most of Rutter's writing has been for broadly church and religious festival performance. These are the kind of *commissions* he receives. But he's not *exclusive*. Among his 'other' works are a piano concerto, and two operas for children, one with the intriguing *title*, "Bang". And he has a charming *orchestral* suite, which is the next item in this week's programme. It's titled "Suite Antique", though it's obviously 20th century and not 'antique' in that sense... It dates from 1979, when the composer was asked to write it for a rural festival in Berkshire, England, for a concert in a local parish church. Also on the programme, to be played by the London Baroque Soloists, was J.S.Bach's Fifth Brandenburg Concerto. Rutter decided to write for the *same* combination of *instruments* as the Bach concerto, using flute, harpsicord and strings. In *his* six movements he also wanted to pay a musical homage to the forms and styles of Bach's time, with a Prelude, Ostinato, Aria, Waltz, Chanson and Rondeau. The waltz in particular is a more tongue-in-cheek 20th century intruder.

MUSIC: Suite Antique CD 20514 ## 7 – 12 17:12

KANE: John Rutter paying tribute to Bach, with his 1979 Suite Antique, played by the City of London Sinfonia. Ten years before that, while still a student at Clare College, Cambridge, Rutter wrote his first large-scale choral work, called *The Falcon*. The title is the name of an English medieval poem of the 15th century, which is rich in symbolism of the Eucharist, of the Grail Legend, and of the Glastonbury thorn (*that's* from a legend about a visit to Glastonbury by Joseph of Arimathea in whose tomb Jesus was buried). From his reading of the poem grew Rutter's musical idea of a triptique, moving from images of a warlike Old Testament Jehovah, through the sacrifice of Christ as portrayed in The Falcon poem, to the vision of peace presented in the Book of Revelation. The première of The Falcon took place in the chapel of King's College, performed by the Cambridge University Musical Society Chorus and Orchestra with the Choir of King's College, conducted by David Willcocks --- something of a feather in his cap for the young Rutter. In this work, as in several others, Rutter uses some Gregorian chant; and here, as again elsewhere, it's a boys' choir that sings the chant. One of the musical formative experiences of Rutter himself was his taking part, as a schoolboy chorister, in the premiere recording of Benjamin Britten's "War Requiem", in 1963. He's said, of that experience, that "I think we knew that we were touching the hem of history's garment". It's certainly a memory he keeps coming back to, as we shall hear again later. The three movements of The Falcon follow on without breaks. The text for the first movement comes from Ps 98: "O sing unto the Lord a new song, for he hath done marvellous things". In the longer second movement we hear The Falcon poem, interspersed with the chant of the 14th century motet "Ave Verum corpus" and the Easter Day antiphon "Surrexit Dominus de Sepulcro" (the Lord is risen from the tomb). The third movement text is from Revelations: "Behold the city of God is with men; he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people". Again, the chant of the boys' choir comes in, with a 7th century verse, "Urbs Jerusalem beata", 'Blessed city Jerusalem, vision of peace'. And the work ends with the words "Agnus Dei.... Dona nobis pacem", 'Grant us peace'.

