

What Sweeter Music: John Rutter

RTHK Radio 4
Tues. 19:00 – 20:00

Programme: 5
4 december 2007

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

KANE: “What sweeter music”, one of John Rutter’s many *Christmas* carols. I’m Ciaran Kane, presenting you with *another* programme of music by Rutter, but not yet his *carols*, except for *one* that might be called ‘seasonal’ music. Most of *this* programme, tho’, is taken up by the most *recently* recorded of his *major* works, ‘Mass of the Children’, written towards the end of 2002. More about *that*, later. I’m starting off with an *Advent anthem*. (‘Advent’ is the four week period leading up to Christmas Day). The *words* of this anthem come from ch.60 of the biblical Book of Isaiah, some of which will be *familiar* to anyone who knows the first part of Handel’s ‘Messiah’. “Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee”. Rutter wrote this anthem, for choir and organ, in 1999, a *commission* from Westminster Cathedral, London, as part of an *Advent* service in the cathedral that year. This premiere *recording* of it was made at Douai Abbey in the summer of 2002, with the composer as the recording producer, the choir of Clare College, Cambridge conducted by Timothy Brown; the organist, Nicholas Rimmer.

MUSIC: Arise, shine Naxos 8.557130 # 8 4:40

KANE: An anthem composed for Advent 1999, “Arise, Shine”, by John Rutter. His most *recent recorded* major work is his ‘Mass of the Children’, written towards the end of 2002 and first performed in the Carnegie Hall, New York, in February 2003. It’s scored for mixed choir, children’s choir, soprano and baritone soloists. As is Rutter’s *habit*, he provides the accompaniment in an *orchestral* version, and in a version for chamber ensemble and organ. A *reason* for this, as he’s explained it, is that the *use* of orchestra in *church* is more common and acceptable in north America than in his native England, and his work gets a *lot* of American performances. Though he’d written a successful ‘Requiem’ in 1985, approaching the age of 60

he'd not yet written a *Mass*, and seemed eager to do so. One of Rutter's *own* most formative and inspiring experiences was his taking part as a boy chorister in the first recording of Benjamin Britten's "War Requiem", in 1963. It gave him his appreciation of gregorian chant, and of the unique sound mixture of adult and children's voices together. It was probably also, he's said, the *seed* for his "Mass of the Children". He wanted to write a work combining these forces in a more *joyful* context than a Requiem, and the Latin text of the 'Missa Brevis' (that is, omitting the usual 'Credo') gave him the framework he was looking for. To this he added in a number of *English* texts. *Another* factor for him was to 'repay a debt', as he said, by giving more children the chance to experience singing together with adults, and to give the *children's* choir an *equal* footing with the adults'. This as the result of his *own* experience singing with adult choirs in big orchestral works like Britten's "War Requiem" and Mahler's 3rd symphony. What he's added in English (sung by soloists or the children's choir) is two well-known prayers by 17th century English churchman and hymnologist, Bishop Thomas Ken, William Blake's poem "The Lamb", a *prayer* based on one by the famous early 17th century preacher and writer Lancelot Andrews, and a prayer based on the traditional "Breastplate of St Patrick". Bishop Ken's prayers were written as morning and evening hymns for the scholars of Winchester College: "Awake my soul", and "Glory to Thee my God this night". Rutter inserts them at the beginning and ending of his *Mass of the Children*, thus giving a feel of a whole day's activities to the work. Blake's poem "The Lamb" is inserted into the 'Agnus Dei' section of the Mass ("Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world"), together with the other texts. Bishop Ken's evening hymn, sung by the children to the melody of the famous Tallis Canon and in counterpoint to the latin "Dona nobis pacem", makes a lovely ending to the work. John Rutter *himself* produced and engineered this recording of his 'Mass of the Children', with the Choir of Clare College, Cambridge, and the Farnham Youth Choir, and soloists Angharad Gruffydd-Jones (soprano) and Jeremy Huw Williams (baritone) all conducted by Timothy Brown.

MUSIC: Mass of the Children Naxos 8.557922 ## 1 – 5 35:43

KANE: John Rutter’s ‘Mass of the Children’, written in late 2002. His Christmas carol “What sweeter music can we bring...” has been *starting* this *series* of programmes devoted to his music. And indeed, what better Christmas *gift* could you think of than a carol from the “carol-man” himself ? *That* was the good fortune of a Mr and Mrs Grier in 1984, for whom Rutter wrote the seasonal song “The very best time of year”. The couple were two noted American choral musicians who were among the first to welcome the composer into the American choral community on his early visits to the country in the 1970s and 80s. As for most of his carols, the *words* as well as the music of “The very best time of year” are his. But unusually, *this* is more in the line of ‘chestnuts roasting on an open fire’, focussed on the *season* and seasonal customs and nostalgia rather than the Christmas event itself.... ‘season’s’ greetings, rather than ‘Christmas greetings’. This *recording* of ‘The very best time of year’, with the Cambridge Singers and the City of London Sinfonia conducted by Rutter himself, was made in the spring of 1985, not long after its writing.

MUSIC: The very best time of year 04 X 04 # 21 3:40

KANE: A Christmas present of John Rutter to good friends in the United States, “The very best time of year” --- the time that’s *inspired* his inventive and delightful output of so many charming carols. We’ll hear more of *them* later, but for now that’s all for this week.

**MUSIC: What sweeter music.... 04 X 04 # 17 prefade to end of
programme 53:00**

total music time : 44:38 total words: 965 (c. 7')