

## What Sweeter Music: John Rutter

RTHK Radio 4  
Tues. 19:00 – 20:00

Programme: 6  
11 december 2007

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

**KANE:** Hello again. I'm Ciaran Kane, bringing you *another* programme of music by John Rutter. *This* time, some of his *Christmastime* music: his own compositions, as well as his arrangements and settings of a couple of carols, one old English one, another from the United States. But the *main* item in this programme evokes *winter* rather than *Christmas* specifically : a set of early English songs, "When Icicles Hang". To *start* with, though, here's one of the very *first* two carols that Rutter wrote, as a teenager, the "Shepherd's Pipe Carol". The *words* as *well* as the music are his. It sets the tone and style for many of his later carol compositions, and has remained a firm favourite. As an undergraduate at university, Rutter had this and its companion piece, "The Nativity Carol" sung and recorded, his first published work, *himself* acting as the producer. *This* recording, with the Cambridge Singers and the City of London Sinfonia, was made in 1985.

**MUSIC:** Shepherd's Pipe Carol      04 X 04 # 11      2:54

**KANE:** One of the first carols that John Rutter wrote, in his teens, the "Shepherd's Pipe Carol". Apart from writing his own carol *words*, Rutter has made numerous *arrangements* of traditional and well-known carols. Among *lesser-known* ones, here's an old folk carol from Cornwall in the far southwest of England. It's known as the "Sans Day Carol": the *title* is a corruption of the name of a village in Cornwall, St Day, called after a Breton saint, where the carol was heard and written down in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It became known through being included in the seminal Oxford Book of Carols, and Rutter's setting of it gained wide acknowledgement because of performances of it by the King's College Choir. "Now the holly bears a berry..."

**MUSIC: Sans Day Carol                      04 X 04   # 15                      3:07**

**KANE:** Rutter's arrangement of the folk carol from Cornwall, the Sans Day carol. Another *commissioned* anthem next, "Come down O Love Divine". This was written in 1998 for the combined choirs of Westminster Abbey, Westminster Cathedral and St Paul's Cathedral, London. It's an invocation of the Holy Spirit from a 13<sup>th</sup> century latin text, the "Golden Sequence": the English translation was made by R.F.Littledale, a 19<sup>th</sup> century Anglican clergyman, from an Italian source. Involving a double-chorus, this is one of Rutter's more complex and demanding compositions. Again, Clare College Choir and the City of London Sinfonia are the performers.

**MUSIC: Come Down, O Love Divine    Naxos 8.557130   # 9                      6:51**

**KANE:** John Rutter's 1998 anthem, *Come Down O Love Divine*. There are six songs in the *set* of Early English songs that Rutter's called "When Icicles Hang". He was asked to write something *seasonal* but not specifically Christmas for a December concert by the Wandsworth School Boys' Choir in 1973. The *texts* for two of them are from Shakespeare, *one* is by the Renaissance poet, Thomas Campion, the other three from 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century England. The title song, "When icicles hang by the wall" is two verses from one of Shakespeare's early comedies, "Love's Labour Lost". Thomas Campion's "Winter Nights" follows: "Now winter nights enlarge the number of their hours, And clouds their storms discharge upon the airy towers". Next comes a 15<sup>th</sup> century round-song, "Good Ale": 'Bring us in good ale, and bring us in good ale, For our blessed Lady's sake, bring us in good ale'. The three remaining songs are sung without break, "Blow, blow, thou winter wind" from another Shakespeare comedy, "As you like it"; "Winter wakeneth all my care" and "Hay, ay", both anonymous songs from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries respectively. Again, the performers are the Cambridge Singers and the City of London Sinfonia, with baritone solo Simon Davies in the "Winter wakeneth all my care" song. John Rutter's "When Icicles Hang"

**MUSIC: When Icicles Hang                      CD 20514   ## 18 – 23                      21:25**

**KANE:** The song-set for choir and orchestra by John Rutter, "When Icicles

Hang”. The composer has loved *carols* since his childhood and enjoyed singing them as a chorister at school. He started writing his *own* as a teen; and as a university undergraduate made many *arrangements* of traditional and well-known carols. This was partly as an antidote to emphasis on post-Weber serialism as the “approved” compositional style for the classically-trained music student ---- *that* never much *appealed* to the young Rutter. He worked with David Willcocks, who had *begun* the very successful and widely used series of booklets, “Carols for Choirs”, which led to their *joint* editing and arranging of the book, “100 Carols for Choirs”. Arrangements by Rutter of carols both old and new, familiar and unfamiliar, have expanded the repertoire of many a choir and the enjoyment of many a listener. And he’s drawn a number of *American* folksongs and carols into his style and portfolio of arrangements. Here’s a sample, with his ‘Go Tell it on the Mountain’

**MUSIC: Go Tell it on the Mountain      94 X 02 # 18      3:07**

**KANE:** Rutter’s arrangement of “Go Tell it on the Mountain”, recorded in 1993. And to *end* with today, two more of Rutter’s *blessing*-anthems, both specially connected with Clare College, his alma-mater. He kept up his ties there after leaving to work independently in 1979. Then in 2000, his son Christopher followed him to Clare to study computer science, and sang in the choir his father had previously directed. In his few months there before his tragic death Christopher sang *both* of these anthems, the first, “A Clare Blessing”, written in 1998 as a gift to the college. The words are Rutter’s own: “May the Lord show his mercy upon you”

**MUSIC: A Clare Blessing      Naxos 8.557130 # 11      3:30**

**KANE:** Finally, “Go forth into the world in peace”. The *text* of this blessing-anthem is adapted from the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, and was set to music by John Rutter in 1988, dedicated to the choir of Clare College on the eve of their first tour visit to the United States. It’s sung here by the choir, under their director Timothy Brown.

**MUSIC: Go Forth into the World in Peace Naxos 8.557130 # 12 2:42**

**KANE:** “Go forth into the world in peace”: a blessing-anthem of John Rutter concluding this week’s programme in the series devoted to his music, “What sweeter music can we bring”

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

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total music 44:11 total words 966 (c.7')