

What Sweeter Music: John Rutter

RTHK Radio 4
Tues. 19:00 – 20:00

Programme: 7
18 december 2007

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

KANE: “What sweeter music” --- a carol by John Rutter. The *words*, though, are by Robert Herrick, a 17th century English poet. They come from a *New Year’s* entertainment, and had a music setting by one William Lawes, a highly respected composer at the court of King Charles 1. *A number of* carols have a *history* or *legends* behind them. Best known, perhaps, is the story of how “Silent Night” came to be sung for the first time, to a guitar accompaniment at Christmastime 1818 in the St Nicholas church in the little Austrian town of Oberndorf. Much more *legend* and fantasy is the story of *another*, much *older* and European-wide carol, “In dulci jubilo” (known in *pre-politically correct* English as “Good Christian men rejoice”). *It’s* supposed to’ve been dictated to the 14th century German mystic Henry Suso, who in a vision was drawn into a circle of angels singing and dancing around the Christ-child. *Much* more prosaic and down-to-earth is the story behind one of John *Rutter’s* many carols, “Mary’s Lullaby”. While he was still Director of Music at Clare College, Cambridge, in 1978, the choir was preparing for the recording of a Christmas *television* programme. At their final rehearsal and run-through of the programme on the day *before* the actual *filming* was to take place, it was discovered that the programme was some *three* minutes short. Rutter wrote the words and music of “Mary’s Lullaby” overnight, to fill the time-gap. This 1985 *recording* of it takes three minutes and twenty-seven seconds

MUSIC: Mary’s Lullaby 04 X 04 # 8 3:27

KANE: “Mary’s Lullaby”, John Rutter’s overnight home-work for Christmas 1978.. By the way, he’s *also* made arrangements of both those *other* ‘trad.’ carols I mentioned. The *major* work of his, featuring *today*, is his “Magnificat”, which takes up almost the whole programme time.

He wrote it, (as he recalls), over several hectic weeks early in 1990, and it received its first performance at the Carnegie Hall, New York, in the May of that year. The *recording* we'll hear was made in London in the *following* January. Apart from a school-choir performance of an anthem of his, Rutter's 'Magnificat' is actually the only work of his I myself have heard "live"; and that was in late 1994 *not* in the Cambridge of his Singers and his Clare College, but the 'other' Cambridge, home of Harvard University, in the United States; the composer spends much of his time now in the U.S., where he's in great demand. About the 'Magnificat', he's said that he'd long wished to write an *extended* version of the well-known biblical hymn from chapter one of St Luke's gospel. Over the centuries there've been *numerous* settings of it, but since J.S.Bach's extended treatment of the text surprisingly *few* such *longer* settings have been written, Rutter's noted. *His* problem was how to *approach* the work. The inspiration eventually came from his remarking on the joyous way that festivals of the Virgin Mary were *observed* in Spanish-speaking countries, with people taking to the streets with singing, dancing and processions. It linked up for him the *text* of praise and joy, and the *celebration* of the Virgin Mary to whom the 'Magnificat' is ascribed. Rutter more *consciously* followed *Bach* in *adding* to the liturgical biblical text, as *Bach* did with the two German and two Latin choral motets he interspersed in his *original* version of the canticle. *Rutter* added the lovely old English poem "Of a Rose", the prayer "Sancta Maria" and the Gregorian chant "Sanctus" from the *Missa cum Jubilo* that's *associated* with Marian festivals. In this recording of Rutter's 'Magnificat', Patricia Forbes is the soprano soloist with the Cambridge Singers and the City of London Sinfonia.

MUSIC: Magnificat **96 R 03 ## 1 – 7** **37:05**

KANE: John Rutter's "Magnificat", written in 1990. And to end with today, something in a much less *serious* mood, one of Rutter's own light and light-hearted carols. He has a great facility with words and images in the verses he produces for his 'words *and* music' carols: poetic, but simple English, and with gentle imagination. The carol I've chosen is his "Donkey carol". No connection with reindeer and other extraneous animals, but it's not *unlike* an old carol from Provence, in

southern France, which the *Australian* entertainer Rolf Harris recorded many years ago, about a lame pilgrim and his horse making his way to Bethlehem. "A Provençal Pilgrim" was his translated title. Rutter's donkey, on the other hand, labours along in 5/8 time, "riding over bumpy road, carry Mary all with her heavy load. ..." This carol was written in 1977 for the choir of St Alban's School, north of London.

MUSIC: Donkey Carol 04 X 04 # 4 3:32

KANE: John Rutter's "Donkey Carol", bringing us to the end of *this* programme, and closer to Christmas and a final presentation of carols by the man who's been called *The Carol-Maker*.... some his own, older and more "trad." ones re-arranged by him, or put in a new context. I'm Ciaran Kane --- join me again *next* week for the *final* programme in this series in tribute to the music-making of John Rutter, "What sweeter music can we bring than a carol...."

**MUSIC: What Sweeter Music 04 X 04 # 17 prefade to end at 53:00
programme time**

total music: 44:39 word count: 838 (c. 6')