

## What Sweeter Music: John Rutter

RTHK Radio 4  
Tues. 19:00 – 20:00

Programme: 8  
25 december 2007

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

**KANE:**            A Happy Christmas to you ! and “What Sweeter Music can we bring.....” Carols: a number of them, all from the pen of John Rutter: some his own, completely *new*: others *arranged* by him, made into a *suite*; and Rutter versions of what are probably the two most sung and most loved of all Christmas carols today, *Silent Night* and *Joy to the World*. But to begin with, one of the very *first* of Rutter’s carols, words *and* music, written in 1963 when he was 18, and published together with its better-*known* twin, the Shepherd’s Pipe Carol --- *this* is ‘Nativity Carol’.

**MUSIC:** Nativity Carol                      04 X 04   # 7    4:20

**KANE:**            “Christ is born for aye, Born on Christmas Day”: one of John Rutter’s very *first* carols. First in world-wide *recognition* and *popularity* is probably ‘Silent Night’, written by an Austrian parish-priest and the local schoolmaster nearly 200 years ago. About 20 years ago, in Britain, the BBC ran a contest in which ‘Silent Night’ came out on top and so was chosen to end a TV Christmas special. They asked John Rutter to make a new *arrangement* for it, with an extended *ending* over which the TV credits could roll. This was the result

**MUSIC:** Silent Night                      04 X 04   # 23    3:52

**KANE:**            John *Rutter’s* version, for BBC TV. All *kinds* of music *styles* have lent their voices to Christmas songs and carols. And when Rutter was invited to write a carol for St Alban’s school to the north of London in 1973, it was a time when *Caribbean* music was widely popular in the country. His carol, “Jesus Child” shows that influence, both in the words *and* music Rutter provided.

**MUSIC:** Jesus Child                      04 X 04   # 2    3:18

**KANE:**            Taking part as a teenage chorister in the premiere recording of

Benjamin Britten's "War Requiem" was, for young John Rutter, a most memorable and formative experience. His admiration for Britten *shows* in a piece he wrote some dozen years later, which strongly echoes Britten's "Ceremony of Carols". How *deliberate* an imitation it may have been, I just don't know. But it *is* a setting of a *sequence* of old carols, with a *harp* accompaniment, and it's in two *parts*, three carols to each, with a harp *prelude* to the first and *interlude* leading into the second. It takes its *title*, "Dancing Day" from the *last* of the six carols, "Tomorrow shall be my dancing day". This is a real *dance* carol with words seemingly adapted from an English 16<sup>th</sup> century love-song, into a text that tells the story of Christ's life from Christmas to Easter, and invites everyone to "come unto the general dance". "Dancing Day" *begins* with a harp *Prelude* on the *swinging* rhythm of the first carol, a 14<sup>th</sup> century English song "Angelus ad Virginem" (the original *text* is *latin*). A traditional old English carol follows: "A virgin most pure": and the first part ends with the swaggering "Personent Hodie" a Germanic/Scandinavian text and melody dating from 14<sup>th</sup> century north Europe. After the *Interlude*, the first two pieces in part two are from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, "There is no rose of such virtue", and the "Coventry Carol", the mothers' lament before the killing of the Innocents, from a Christmas-cycle mystery play. "Dancing Day" is sung in this recording by the Toronto Children's Chorus, under their Director Jean Ashworth Bartle, and with Judy Loman (solo harp)

**MUSIC: Dancing Day PCD 2049 (95 X 04) ## 1 – 8 24:41**

**KANE:** "Dancing Day", a suite of six old carols arranged with harp accompaniment, prelude and interlude, by John Rutter, and sung by the Toronto Children's Chorus. Staying in north America (as Rutter himself often does), *his* arrangement, next, of the best-known carol from there: "Joy to the World". The *music* of this seems to've *first* appeared in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and then been used in a number of hymnals edited by the noted music educator and leading figure in American church music, Lowell Mason. And it was Mason who first put it together with the words of Isaac Watts, the 18<sup>th</sup> century English nonconformist hymnwriter and theologian. In Mason's editions, the tune is described as being "from Handel" ---- maybe because it

sounds a bit like the start of 'Glory to God' and 'Lift up your heads' from Handel's "Messiah". There's a *suspicion* that maybe Mason *himself* wrote it: he *was* known as a bit of a snob about introducing the 'best' of Europe's music (Mozart, Haydn, Handel etc.) to America's musical world, in the Boston of his day. Be all that as it may, in response to a request by his *American* publisher John Rutter in 1981 made *this* setting of *Joy to the World* as a tribute to the presumed Handelian origin of the tune.

**MUSIC: Joy to the World 04 X 04 # 18 2:30**

**KANE:** John Rutter's 'Handel-isation' of the Lowell Mason carol, 'Joy to the World'. You're listening to the *final* programme in a *series* that's been devoted to the music-making of contemporary English composer John Rutter. So, to *end* with one of his *signature* carols, where the words and *music* are *his*, and the recording (like for *all* of this programme except the 'Dancing Day' suite) is by *his* choir, the Cambridge Singers, conducted by himself, and published on his own label ---- here's a "Christmas Lullaby": it's one of *three* carols commissioned in England by The Bach Choir in 1989 in celebration of the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday of their noted conductor, and Rutter's friend and mentor, Sir David Willcocks. [ Shd. be 46:28 ]

**MUSIC: Christmas Lullaby 04 X 04 # 12 4:04**

**KANE:** "Christmas Lullaby", a final carol from the 'carol-maker' himself, John Rutter. I'm Ciaran Kane, and I hope you've *enjoyed* this *series* of programmes with me, listening to the tuneful variety and uncomplicated presentation of his music-making, so much aimed at being accessible for *most* relatively good choirs, and enabling them to extend their repertoire of attractive sacred music. I leave you with one *last* short piece --- the Rutter adaptation for a *mixed* choir, of an *arrangement* he made for the vocal ensemble, the King's Singers. This is a traditional English Christmas song, which *they* used as a final encore at Christmas concerts when the audience refused to go home. So, from me, a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

**MUSIC: We wish you a merry Christmas 04 X 04 # 22 1:42**

[total music: 45:02 word count 996 (c. 7') ]