

Concerts at The University

Friday 9 November 2012

1.10pm

Reid Concert Hall

Edinburgh University Singers

John Kitchen · conductor and organ

Michael Graham · assistant conductor

Programme of works by MENDELSSOHN,
BRUCKNER and RHEINBERGER.



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Edinburgh College of Art

Two motets

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

Frohlocket, ihr Völker, auf Erden
Heilig, heilig, heilig

Two motets

Anton Bruckner (1824–1896)

Ave Maria
Christus factus est

Two Advent motets Op. 176

Josef Rheinberger (1839–1901)

Ad te levavi
Ex Sion

Andante tranquillo from *Organ Sonata No. 3 in A, Op. 65*

Felix Mendelssohn

Ave Maria, Op. 23, No. 2 (tenor soloist: Jonathon Weldon)

Felix Mendelssohn

Praeludium in C for organ

Anton Bruckner

Two motets

Anton Bruckner

Locus iste
Os justi

Two motets

Josef Rheinberger

Prope est Dominus, Op. 176
Abendlied, Op. 69 No. 3 from *Drei geistliche Gesänge*

Today's programme offers a representative selection of sacred choral music by three 19th-century composers, Mendelssohn, Bruckner and Rheinberger. In addition to his well-known large-scale choral pieces, Mendelssohn wrote a number of short unaccompanied works. Today we begin, rather unseasonally, with *Frohlocket, ihr Völker, auf Erden* which sets a Christmas text: "Rejoice, people on earth, and praise God! The Saviour has appeared....." The music is rich in texture and appropriately joyful in mood. The eight-part *Heilig* sets the Sanctus from the Mass, again in a rich chordal style. Particularly fine, and not well-known, is Mendelssohn's exquisite setting of the well-known *Ave Maria* text ("Hail, Mary, full of grace...") For eight voices, with a prominent tenor solo part, and accompanied by organ, it is in three sections. The central richly sonorous section in F sharp minor ("Holy Mary, pray for us") effectively juxtaposes blocks of voices; this is flanked by gentler, lyrical music in Mendelssohn's best 6/8 style. The *Ave Maria* will be preceded by the slow movement in the same key from Mendelssohn's Third Sonata for organ.

The influences on Bruckner's choral style are various: church modes, Renaissance Catholic polyphony, Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven, all blended with a rich Romantic harmonic style which owes something to Wagner. The motets in today's programme are mature works of great distinction: his *Ave Maria* begins (as indeed does the central section of Mendelssohn's) by contrasting blocks of female and male voices, before all join in a full seven-voice texture. It was written in 1861 for the choir of Linz Cathedral. *Christus factus est* ("Christ became obedient for us unto death, even death on a cross...") is later, dating from 1884, and was written for the professional choir of the Imperial Chapel. Harmonically daring, it involves enharmonic transformations, advanced chromatic writing, and is rich in symbolism. Bruckner's best-known motet, *Locus iste* ("This place has been made by God: it is a sacrament beyond praise and reproof"), is today preceded by a short organ prelude which Bruckner must surely have improvised before or after a performance of the motet on some occasion — although apparently it was a commissioned composition. In its very brief span this prelude explores some extraordinarily Tristanesque harmonies and modulations. The final Bruckner motet to be heard today is *Os justi*, a setting of words from Psalm 37: "The mouth of the just shall meditate wisdom..." Eschewing the chromaticism heard in the other motets, it is influenced by the 19th-century Cecilian movement which advocated a return to 'true, genuine church music' which should be subservient to the liturgy, using church modes and Gregorian chant. This sometimes resulted in a certain blandness, but not in the case of *Os justi*. Here Bruckner writes in the Lydian mode—there is not a single accidental in the entire piece—nevertheless he encapsulates the words magnificently in musical terms. It concludes with a short plainsong *alleluia*.

Rheinberger—possibly Liechtenstein's only composer—is known to most organists as a prolific writer for their instrument; he left twenty substantial sonatas and many shorter pieces. He is perhaps less well-known as a composer of liturgical choral music, although he wrote a number of masses (the first when aged 16), motets and other works. That he too was much inspired by the great Renaissance polyphonists is evident from his liturgical choral works; he saw the Cecilians' approach as inflexible and limiting, and explored Romantic (although not Wagnerian) harmony. His writing is conservative but beautifully crafted, as can be heard in the three Advent motets in the programme: *Ad te levavi* ("Unto Thee, O Lord, I lift up my soul..."); *Ex Sion* ("Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined..."); and *Prope est Dominus* ("The Lord is nigh..."). Many of the same qualities can be heard in his short and exquisite *Abendlied* which sets a verse from St Luke's gospel ("Stay with us, for it will soon be evening, and the day is far spent.")

JK

The **Edinburgh University Singers** were founded in 1945, and have been conducted by John Kitchen since 1988. The choir performs a wide range of sacred and secular music: unaccompanied repertoire from the Renaissance to the present day, works with organ and orchestra, folk-song and Scottish song arrangements, new commissions and so on. The choir sings regularly at University ceremonies such as graduations, and on other important occasions in the McEwan Hall and in Old College. As well as giving concerts in Edinburgh and further afield in Scotland, the choir has visited Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Holland, Norway, Venice and Prague. A trip to Rome is planned for June 2013.

John Kitchen is a Senior Lecturer in Music and University Organist in the University of Edinburgh. He also directs the Edinburgh University Singers, is Director of Music of Old Saint Paul's Episcopal Church and Edinburgh City Organist with duties at the Usher Hall. He gives many solo recitals both in the UK and further afield, and also plays regularly with several ensembles, covering a wide range of musical styles. In addition, he is much in demand as a continuo player, accompanist, lecturer, writer, adjudicator, reviewer and recording artist.

Michael Graham is a fourth-year BMus student in the University, with a special interest in conducting. He has worked with the University's Musical Society Chorus and also with Sinfonia, one of the University's various orchestras. Michael participated recently in a young conductors' course at the Association of British Choral Directors' Convention, and takes regular lessons in conducting.