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## Concerts

### Ripon Cathedral: *Gloriae Dei Cantores.*

THIS professional choir from the United States is at the start of a four-month European tour which will take it to Cambridge, London and on to Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union.

It will be fortunate if it arrives back home in Massachusetts intact. If its 50 members continue to sing as they did last night there will be choral conductors

from here to Leningrad urging them to defect.

Choral singing, in terminal decline in many parts of this country, is said to be experiencing a resurgence in the US and there have been encouraging reports of independent choirs singing difficult repertoire to a high standard.

Even so, one was hardly prepared for the outstanding quality which came rolling down the nave from this ensemble; hardly prepared for an hour and a half of flawless technique and model musicianship.

It was clear from the first phrase of the first work Durufle's Four Motets, Op 10, that this was no average American choir.

In place of the customary saccharine sweetness was a rich, firm tone; in place of the usual lazy vowels, crisp articulation.

But there was more to it than technical excellence, although heaven knows it was rare and refreshing enough to hear a choir phrasing, tuning and pro-

jecting with such skill and assurance.

The success of pieces like Howells' Requiem (a gloriously incandescent performance) and the three Eucharistic Motets of the American Gerald Near was due to the utterly committed and selfless attitude of the choir.

None of that crippling, world-weary, done-it-all-before cynicism which afflicts so many British cathedral and college choirs.

*Gloriae Dei Cantores* behaves and performs like a community of musicians rather than a confluence of egos.

The result is a strong, direct, human sound that even in the chill building would warm the stoniest of hearts and yet had the capacity to inspire and thrill as was made plain in its vigorous account of the *Messe Solennelle* by Langlais.

Not the least of the rewards of an evening rich in them was to see the conductor Elizabeth Paterson shaping the phrases, grading the dynamics, blending the lines with such expressive strength, such caring authority, such palpable concern for the integrity of each piece.

ROBERT COCKROFT

# Cumberland

LATE FINAL

# News

## *Transatlantic sound brings magic moments*

THE American choir Gloriam Dei Cantores who gave a concert in Carlisle Cathedral showed how deeply eloquent and colourful choral singing can be.

Discipline and dedication was very much in evidence throughout the performance given by these present-day New England Pilgrims.

The Quatre Motets of Durufle, which opened the concert, cast an immediate spell upon the audience, as the beautifully balanced flow of sound found gracious acceptance in the Cathedral's acoustics. The listeners were enchanted.

The choir itself is just one public manifestation of the work of a Capuchin religious community, whose worship is a daily act of perpetual devotion.

Its current tour takes the

44 strong choir from Carlisle to the cathedrals of Durham and Newcastle and then on to Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union.

The city concert continued with a performance by one of the two gifted young organists, James E. Jordan, of Herbert Howells' evocation of the world of Elizabethan music, Master Tallis' Testament. The beauty of this portrait in sound was thrillingly revealed in a performance that made full use of the Cathedral Instrument's characteristically English tone, including the majestic diapasons.

The organ's versatility was also abundantly revealed in David H. Chalmers' colourful presentation of

the Prelude from Durufle's famous Suite Op 5.

The distinctly French quality of this music shone forth as clearly as it also did in the organ part of the fine Messe Solennelle of Jean Langlais. This piece gave the choir full opportunity to explore the extremes of their dynamic range. Textures and blend were well balanced right up to the forte level, but in the loudest passages the rich male voices sometimes tended to swamp the sopranos and contraltos.

After the interval came the Requiem of Herbert Howells, in which the singing achieved a sustained poignancy that held the audience in thrall for some while after the actual notes

had died away.

Two American works concluded the programme, the Eucharistic Motets of Gerald Near, and Gertrude Hancock's anthem "Judge Eternal."

None could dispute the beauty of the plainsong based motets, which were beautifully sung. Yet it was especially uplifting to hear the anthem by the organist of St Thomas' church, 3th Avenue, New York, for the specifically American flavour which it brought to the concert.

Conductor Elizabeth Patterson scripted each performance with a loving care that was both graceful to the eye and meaningful to the performers.

R. A. S

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## Reviews

**Gloriae Dei Cantores,  
Ripon Cathedral,  
Thursday, February 15**

IF it is true that Britain and America are divided by a common language, the same cannot be said of music.

Gloriae Dei Cantores — a touring choir of some 40 voices from Orleans, Massachusetts — performed sacred music before a fair audience in Ripon Cathedral.

Their programme of Durufle, Howells, Langlais, and others, embraced a number of 20th century styles so impeccably that it's difficult to write anything other than a list of superlatives.

I can only think of one such professional choir in England and that belongs to the BBC.

"Professional" is the word in the very best sense. Nothing stood between the composer and the listener either in sound or sight.

Indeed, so faithful and sensitive was their singing that it could be argued they did their second-team composers a disservice by showing them to be just that.

A mediocre choir can make even vulgarity sound exciting: a good choir's business is transparent truth.

The most satisfying (to the choir also, probably)

was the Requiem by Herbert Howells. They read his musical soul unerringly. And their long, flowing phrases showed this off to best advantage.

By contrast, the Three Motets by Gerald Near sounded interesting but lacked Howell's conviction. The choir attended to both equally — the differences were due to the composers so faithfully relayed.

All the items were of the same period and I would have enjoyed the Palestrina as a foil. In the Langlais Mass, the sopranos rose happily to a top C on "Hosanna in excelsis", though like Wagner opera, where the main drift is carried by the orchestra, the Choir frequently accompany the organ. In fact, it was the organ that resolved the "Dona nobis pacem" at the end, and not the voices.

The Cathedral's Harrison organ was used in two solo works also. Of these, the Prelude by Derufle suited it better. Some most attractive colours were coaxed from it by David Chalmers, with the all-pervading monotone never far away.

When the choir sang Langlais, they sounded French. In the Howells, English. In Judge Eternal they were explosive-

ly majestic and American.

The programme notes described Palestrina's style as "seemingly inevitable in its excellence". It would equally well apply to Gloriae Dei Cantores. There is little left to say except that this was probably the finest choral singing heard here for a good number of years.

David Andrews

London Times  
March 23 '90

### Noel Goodwin

#### Gloriae Dei Cantores St John's

Gregorian chant in its purest form has the character of unassailable virtue, but is apt to sound compromised when extended in another direction, as the American composer Gerald Near has in his *Resurrexi*. This was premiered by the 40 voices of Gloriae Dei Cantores, a mixed choir from the Massachusetts town of Orleans which will soon visit Prague, Moscow and Leningrad.

In an "ecumenical" programme, the new work (35 minutes long) takes chant-themes of Eastertide to Pentecost, and adapts them to a Latin text of the Resurrection, each of four sections proceeding by antiphon and

recitative to a supplicatory motet.

Though there is evident facility in the working, it is more pastiche than inventive vocal music, restricting itself to bland verbalization, except when adorned by the Byzantine effect of celebratory handbells during the opening and closing "Alleluia". The singing had secure pitch and homogenous tone moulded into direct expression by the conductor, Elizabeth Patterson.

At the outset, a Mass by Lassus sounded unduly stolid, but the voices were more flexible in Purcell's *Funeral Music for Queen Mary*, especially in the chromatically intense writing of "In the midst of life" and with exemplary clarity in the second setting of "Thou Knowest, Lord".

The suite was dignified by the London-based quintet of "His Majesties Sagbutts and Cornetts" for the instrumental interludes.



# Chanting a united tune out from Cape Cod

"ENCHANTING," Cardinal Hume is said to have remarked at the end of a concert he attended recently at St John's in Smith Square, London. The music was certainly of a type he would remember well from his Ampleforth days — Gregorian chant — and delivered from the mouths of a group of Christians who live and work alongside one another.

But there the comparisons with monastic life end, for the *Gloriae Dei Cantores* Choir is composed, not of celibate men, but of married men and women. Many of its members are in fact married to one another; and all live together in a community which sounds like a housing estate where you can be sure your neighbour is a card-carrying Christian.

The community is based in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and was set up in 1970 by a group of Christians of different denominations who wanted to prove that they could live together despite their separate beliefs. Initially, there was no musical side to the community at all: in fact, it was precisely because the quality of singing at services was so dire that the choir was born at all.

**Gloriae Dei, an ecumenical choir, is currently on tour in Britain. Joanna Moorhead reports on its unlikely background**

"The level of music was really awful in those early days, and eventually my husband Richard and I were asked to try to do something about it," explains Elizabeth Patterson, director of the *Gloriae Dei*. The obvious thing to do was set up a choir, but the Pattersons came up against a wall of deep-seated resentment and a complete dearth of enthusiasm.

The trouble was, the couple soon discovered, that many of the people in the community had been discouraged from music at an early age, usually by teachers who told them they had "no ear for music" or that they were "tone deaf". As a result, they had become convinced that music and singing were things they should steer well clear of, for fear of making fools of themselves.

Elizabeth and Richard decided to challenge these prejudices and misapprehensions. "We knew we weren't going to get anywhere unless we changed people's attitudes. So we tried

explaining to them that singing was just another way of doing what we were all seeking to do in our community — that is, to praise God. And that it was a form of prayer which would enrich our lives. Gradually, they came to believe us, and to understand what we meant," says Elizabeth.

At the same time, Elizabeth tried to persuade others in the community that there was no one, but no one, who just shouldn't sing. "I firmly hold that anyone with a pair of vocal cords can sing," she says. "The only thing is — and I told them this as well — they have to be prepared to be disciplined, to do what they're told, when they're in a choir."

The formula worked. Before long, Elizabeth and Richard were coaching crowded choir practices. The singing became acceptable, then even good — but no-one ever believed the choir had the capacity to become world-famous.

"We were only aiming to be

good enough to sing at our own services, not to tour the world," says Elizabeth. But the choir's fame — especially as specialists in performing Gregorian chant — spread, and soon they were being asked to sing in churches throughout the US. Then, four years ago, they visited Britain for the first time and met Dr George Guest, director of the choir of St John's College, Cambridge. He offered to become their consultant, and since then the choir has returned each year to spend a few weeks studying in the town.

Studying the origins and meanings of the music they perform is of great importance to the 44 choir members, for they have never forgotten the advice given them by Richard and Elizabeth Patterson, and still see their music as first and foremost a way of praising God. This is one of the reasons why Gregorian chant has become such a favourite with them, because they see it as one of the purer forms of religious music.

"We like it because it seems to flow most spontaneously from men's hearts," explains Elizabeth Patterson. "It's also wholly scriptural, and the text is primary, rather than secondary. It's clearly under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit."

Being part of a Christian community means the choir is much more closely-knit than other similar groups. "I guess what it means is, we have some fights and a whole lot of love," contends Elizabeth.

Being composed at least partly of married couples obviously gives a closeness. But for Catholic Betsey Bott, 43, being a contralto with the *Gloriae Dei* has meant leaving her husband and their two young sons back in Cape Cod for the current three-month European tour. "It was hard to say goodbye knowing I'd be away so long," she says. "But I'd never dream of doing it unless we lived in the community." The family live in a house with an older couple, Betsey explains, and this means she knows her youngsters will be well cared-for during her absence. "That was one of the



Elizabeth Patterson

things that appealed to me about the community in the first place I suppose," she explains. "I grew up in a big family with lots of relatives around and I just love the feeling of having plenty of people nearby who you know you can trust and rely on.