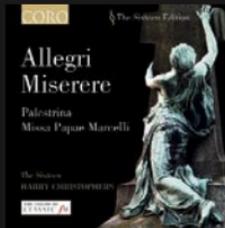


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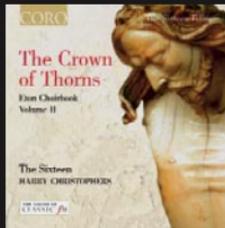
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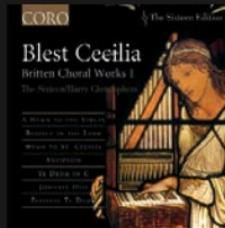
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BBC RADIO 3, CD REVIEW

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§ The Sixteen Edition

à la Gloire de Dieu

BARBER

STRAVINSKY

TIPPETT

POULENC

The Sixteen
BBC Philharmonic
HARRY CHRISTOPHERS



À la Gloire de Dieu represents for me a sort of personal crusade. One thing about creating my own group is that I can indulge in music that has had a profound affect on me. Two such composers form the core of this disc, Stravinsky and Poulenc.

Francis Steele, friend and founder member of The Sixteen's bass section,

reminded me of an evening early in our student days at Oxford; I sat him down in my rooms and introduced him to Leonard Bernstein's, then new, recording of Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*. He did not know the work and I said, "you have to hear it, it's fantastic" and "one day we're going to do it". Twenty five years on that is just what happened in a perfect marriage of two great ensembles, the BBC Philharmonic and The Sixteen.

As for Poulenc, he has always been a composer who fascinated me; at school, struggling with the technical difficulties of his clarinet sonata, at university, attempting to do justice to his choral works – all achievable and, above all, worthwhile. Then, one day, I turned on the radio eager to hear the last work Poulenc ever wrote, his *Sept Répons de Ténèbres*. I was expectant but, in the end, frustrated and annoyed. I even phoned the BBC to complain! Had no-one listened to this recording before transmitting it – it was quite simply a travesty. From that moment, I was determined one day to redress the balance.

And so this is the result; a recording born out of idealism and youthful exuberance.

Harry
Christman,

CHARLES IVES (1874-1954)

The Unanswered Question

"A Contemplation of a Serious Matter" or "The Unanswered Perennial Question" – "A Cosmic Sometime Landscape": thus too at various times did Ives name this piece. Though Yale-educated, Charles inherited from his father an utter lack of preconception as to how music should be, the most vernacular, natural, popular material-hymns, brass bands, rag-time, horses' hooves on cobbles – jostling in his mind and his music with increasingly transcendent, philosophical issues. 'The Unanswered Question' deals with the deepest question of all, which had preoccupied Ives since his father's death in 1894. According to Ives' own detailed 'Notes to the Performers', this 'Perennial Question of Existence' is intoned by the trumpet, while the 'hunt for "The Invisible Answer"' is undertaken by 'the flutes and other human beings', each time more agitated. Meanwhile the (off-stage) strings continue on their impassive way, representing "The Silences of the Druids – who Know, See and Hear Nothing". Silence, while signifying sleep and death, also contains the possibility of a response, is in a sense fraught with sound; conversely, it requires the original genius of Ives to convey a truly other-worldly silence by means of music.

SAMUEL BARBER (1910-1981)

Agnus Dei

When Leonard Bernstein died, one of the tributes broadcast was his own recording of Samuel Barber's 'Adagio' with the New York Philharmonic, a performance of electric slowness. The music originated in 1936 as the 2nd movement of Barber's first String Quartet. Immediately convinced of its viability as a separate piece, he transcribed it for string orchestra; in the 1960s he returned to it again, setting it to the words 'Agnus Dei' from the Latin mass, and sacrificing none of its elegiac power.

IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882-1971)

Symphony of Psalms

(1930, rev. 1948)

Stravinsky was born and brought up in Russia, in a strict Orthodox faith, to which he returned in 1926, rediscovering the religious depths of his nature. Soon after he received a commission from Koussevitsky for a work for the Boston Symphony Orchestra's 50th anniversary. The idea of composing in symphonic form appealed to Stravinsky, whose previous large-scale works had been dramatic, and the combination of his re-found faith with the publisher's request for 'something popular' gave him the theme needed to avoid the problem of the to him unappealing 'symphonic tradition'. He set verses from the Psalms, initially in Slavonic but soon changing to Latin, this being the most universal (spoken, or sung) language he could find.

The degree to which by this stage in his career Stravinsky was totally his own master is immediately clear from the symphony's scoring. In a subtle tribute to an orchestra whose admirers might find it hard to say whether the upper strings or brass are more virtuosic, he omits the former altogether, as also the clarinets, determined to avoid any gratuitously sensuous quality or any sound to blur his acute imagination. In addition he used two pianos, which combine with harp and timpani in the symphony's haunting coda to create the sound of soft Russian bells.

When the funeral of Stravinsky, in Venice on 15 April 1971, was televised in England, this last movement was played as the gondola bore him across the lagoon to San Michelo. The 'Symphony' belongs to Venice, because of that city's links with Byzantium, and the music's ritualistic, hieratic timelessness - constructed as it is from glittering fragments like the mosaics of St Mark's, as well as long, simply inflected vocal phrases as objective and calm as the gaze of an icon, exemplifying Stravinsky's dedication, 'à la gloire de DIEU'.

SIR MICHAEL TIPPETT (1905-1998)

Five Negro Spirituals from 'A Child of Our Time' (1944)

Though as moved, perplexed and horrified as any of his fellows by public events, above all the rise of fascism in Europe in the 1930s and its desperate sequel, Stravinsky's characteristic artistic response was to transcend the personal, seek the universal in objectivity. Tippett's music is a complete contrast: he dives deep into himself to seize the essential expression of the Zeitgeist, thence reaches out in compassion to the world outside. But he is also a technical master, and in his oratorio 'A Child of Our Time' - a reaction to the oppression and division he saw around him - he consciously used traditional Passions and oratorios as a formal basis, even down to the use of Negro spirituals in the place of the Lutheran Chorales." ('Moving into Aquarius'.) The spirituals, he said, "should not be thought of as congregational hymns, but as integral parts of the Oratorio": 'Go Down Moses', for example, is cast as 'A Spiritual of Anger'. The anger is not purely personal; Tippett wrote, "I felt I had to express collective feelings and that could only be done by collective tunes such as the Negro spirituals, for these tunes contain a deposit of generations of common experience." And, ultimately positive, as *his* superscription Tippett writes: '... the darkness declares the glory of light.'

FRANCIS POULENC (1899-1963)

Sept Répons des Ténèbres (1963)

Commissioned by the New York Philharmonic, whose music director was Leonard Bernstein, 'in Celebration of its Opening Season in the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts', this was Poulenc's last religious work, and his last choral. As with Stravinsky in his latter years, these were categories which had increasingly occupied Poulenc since his return to his native Catholic faith in the 30s. First approached about the New York commission in early 1960, Poulenc began with some apprehension on entering 'les ténèbres', as he wrote to Pierre Bernac in September, a little later remarking that his first 'répons', rather to his surprise, was "more Mantegna than Zurbaran" - more realistic and tragic than sentimental. In March '62 he told Bernac, "I have finished 'les Ténèbres'... I think it is beautiful and I do not regret having taken all this time over it... With the 'Gloria' and the 'Stabat' I think I have three good religious works. May they spare me a few days of purgatory, if I do narrowly avoid going to hell." Yet Poulenc had only just delivered the corrected proofs to his publisher when he died, of a heart attack, on 30 January 1963; 'Sept Répons' was first performed in April of that year. This is, above all, liturgical before it is concert music. With his slight chronological re-ordering of the Holy Week texts, the 'Répons' emerges as a Passion, narrative alternating with reflection, ending like Bach's 'St John' with the burial of Christ and a 'final chorus' of hope even if, too, of typical Poulenc ambiguity. Harmonic ambiguity, not spiritual: Poulenc tried always to give "an impression of fervour, and above all of humility ... essentially direct and, if I dare say it, familiar ..." Stravinsky once wrote to Poulenc, "You are truly *good*, and that is what I find again and again in your music."

NICOLAS ROBERTSON

SAMUEL BARBER

Agnus Dei

SOPRANO

Fiona Clarke, Sophie Daneman,
RUTH DEAN, Nicola Jenkin,
Nicola Jane-Kemp, Carys Lane

ALTO

Philip Newton, Nigel Short,
Helen Templeton, Caroline Trevor

TENOR

Philip Daggett, Duncan MacKenzie,
Thomas Phillips, Nicolas Robertson

BASS

Simon Birchall, Michael Bundy,
Roger Cleverdon, Timothy Jones

IGOR STRAVINSKY

Symphony of Psalms *

SIR MICHAEL TIPPETT

Five Negro Spirituals from 'A Child of Our Time' **

FRANCIS POULENC

Sept Répons des Ténèbres⁺

SOPRANO

Caroline Ashton, Fiona Clarke,
Libby Crabtree, Sally Dunkley,
Nicola Jenkin, Carys Lane,
Rebecca Outram, Katie Pringle

ALTO

Sally Bruce-Payne, Andrew Giles,
Michael Lees, Philip Newton,
Christopher Royall, Susanna Spicer

TENOR

John Bowen⁺⁺, Andrew Carwood⁺⁺,
Simon Davies, Neil MacKenzie⁺⁺⁺,
David Roy⁺⁺⁺, Angus Smith,
Matthew Vine, Andrew Wicks

BASS

Simon Birchall, Robert Evans,
Charles Gibbs, Thomas Hunt,
Timothy Jones, Francis Steele

The Sixteen

BBC Philharmonic

HARRY CHRISTOPHERS

SAMUEL BARBER

Agnus Dei

Agnus Dei
Qui tollis peccata mundi,
Miserere nobis, Dona nobis pacem.

*O Lamb of God
Who takes away the sins of the world,
Have mercy upon us, Grant us peace*

IGOR STRAVINSKY

Symphony Of Psalms

Exaudi orationem meam Domine
et deprecationem meam.
Auribus percipe lacrimas meas. Ne sileas.
Quoniam advena ego sum apud te
et peregrinus, sicut omnes patres mei.
Remitte mihi, ut refrigerer
prius quam abeam,
et amplius non ero.

*Hear my prayer o Lord
and with thine ears consider my calling.
Hold not thy peace at my tears.
For I am a stranger with thee:
and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.
o spare me a little, that I may recover my strength:
before I go hence,
and be no more seen. (Psalm 39 v.13-15)*

Expectans expectavi Dominum,
et intendit mihi.
Et exaudivit preces meas:
et eduxit me de lacu miseriae,
et de luto faecis.
Et statuit super petram pedes meos:
et direxit gressus meos.
Et immisit in os meum canticum novum,
carmen Deo nostro.
Videbunt multi, et timebunt:
et sperabunt in Domino.

Alleluia.
Laudate Dominum in sanctis eius:
laudate eum in firmamento virtutis eius.
Laudate eum in virtutibus eius:
laudate eum secundum multitudinem
magnitudinis eius.
Laudate eum in sono tubae:
(laudate eum in psalterio, et cithara).
Laudate eum in tympano, et choro:
laudate eum in chordis, et organo.
Laudate eum in cymbalis benesonantibus:
laudate eum in cymbalis jubilationibus:
omnis spiritus
laudet Dominum.

*I waited patiently for the Lord:
and he inclined unto me
and heard me calling.
He brought me also out of the horrible pit,
out of the mire and clay:
and set my feet upon the rock
and ordered my goings.
And he hath put a new song in my mouth:
even a thanksgiving unto our Cod.
Many shall see it and fear:
and shall put their trust in the Lord. (Psalm 40 v.1 -4)*

*Alleluia.
o praise God in his holiness:
praise him in the firmament of his power.
Praise him in his noble acts:
praise him according to his
excellent greatness.
Praise him in the sound of the trumpet:
(praise him upon the lute and harp).
Praise him in the cymbals and dances:
praise him upon the strings and pipe.
Praise him upon the well-tuned cymbals:
praise him upon the loud cymbals.
Let everything that hath breath:
Praise the Lord. (Psalm 150)*

SIR MICHAEL TIPPETT

Five Negro Spirituals from 'A Child of Our Time'

Steal Away

*Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus;
o steal away, steal away home,
I han't got long to stay here.
My Lord, He calls me, He calls me by the thunder
The trumpet sounds within my soul
I han't got long to stay here.
Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus;
o steal away, steal away home,
I han't got long to stay here.*

Nobody knows

*Nobody knows the trouble I see, Lord
Nobody knows like Jesus.
o brothers, pray for me, and
help me to drive old Satan away, Lord.
o mothers, pray for me, and
help me to drive old Satan away, Lord.
Nobody knows the trouble I see, Lord
Nobody knows like Jesus.*

Go down, Moses

*Go down, Moses
Way down in Egypt land;
Tell old Pharoah
To let my people go.*

*When Israel was in Egypt land
Oppressed so hard
They could not stand,
"Thus spake the Lord"
bold Moses said,
"If not, I'll smite your first-born dead"
Go down, Moses.*

By and by

*o by and by, by and by,
I'm going to lay down my heavy load.
I know my robe's going to fit me well
I've tried it on at the gates of Hell.
Hell is deep and a dark despair
o stop, poor sinner and don't go there!
o by and by, by and by,
I'm going to lay down my heavy load.*

Deep River

*Deep river, my home is over Jordan.
Lord, I want to cross over into camp ground.
o chillun!
o don't you want to go to that gospel feast,
That promised land,
That land where all is peace.
Walk into heaven, and take my seat
And cast my crown at Jesus' feet.
Deep river, my home is over Jordan.
Lord, I want to cross over into camp ground.*

FRANCIS POULENC

Sept Répons des Ténèbres

I. Una hora non potuistis vigilare mecum

(Maundy Thursday)

Una hora non potuistis vigilare mecum,
qui exhortabamini mori pro me?

Vel ludam non videtis, quomodo non dormit,
sed festinat tradere me Iudaeis?

Quid dormitis?

surgite, et orate, ne intretis in tentationem.

*Could ye not watch one hour with me,
ye that were eager to die for me?*

*Or do you not see Judas, how he sleeps not,
but makes haste to betray me to the Jews?*

Why do you sleep?

Arise and pray, lest ye fall into temptation.

II. Judas mercator pessimus

(Maundy Thursday)

Judas mercator pessimus osculo
petiit Dominum: ille ut agnus innocens
non negavit Judae osculum:

Denariorum numero

Christum Judaeis tradidit. Melius illi erat
si natus non fuisset.

*The wicked merchant Judas sought our
Lord with a kiss. He, like an innocent lamb,
refused not the kiss of Judas.*

For a few coins he delivered

*Christ to the Jews. It had been better for him
if he had never been born.*

III. Jesum tradidit

(Good Friday)

Jesum tradidit impius summis principibus
sacerdotum, et senioribus populi:

Petrus autem sequebatur eum a longe,
ut videret finem.

Adduxerunt autem eum ad Caipham
principem sacerdotum, ubi scribae et
pharisaei convenerant.

*The wicked man betrayed Jesus to the
chief priests and elders of the people;
but Peter followed him afar off,
to see the end.*

*And they led him to Caiphias,
the chief priest, where the scribes and
Pharisees were met together.*

IV. Caligaverunt oculi mei

(Good Friday)

Caligaverunt oculi mei a fletu meo:
quia elongatus est a me, qui consolabatur me:
Videte, omnes populi, si est dolor similis
sicut dolor meus.

o vos omnes, qui transitis per viam,
attendite et videte.

*My eyes became dim with my weeping:
for he is far from me that consoled me.
See, all ye people, if there be sorrow
like my sorrow.*

*o all ye that pass by this way,
attend and see.*

V. Tenebrae factae sunt

(Good Friday)

Tenebrae factae sunt,
dum crucifixissent Jesum Judaei:
et circa horam nonam
exclamavit Jesus voce magna:
Deus meus, ut quid me dereliquisti?
Et inclinato capite, emisit spiritum.

Exclamans Jesus voce magna ait:
Pater in manus tuas
commendo spiritum meum.

*There was darkness
when the Jews crucified Jesus;
and about the ninth hour
Jesus cried out with a loud voice:
My God, why hast thou forsaken me?
And bowing down his head, he gave up the ghost.
Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said:
Father, into thy hands
I commend my spirit.*

VI. Sepulto Domino

(Holy Saturday)

Sepulto Domino,
signatum est monumentum,
volventes lapidem ad ostium monument:
Ponentes milites, qui custodirent ilium.
Accedentes principes sacerdotum ad Pilatum,
petierunt ilium.

VII. Ecce quomodo moritur Justus

(Holy Saturday)

Ecce quomodo moritur Justus,
et nemo percipit corde:
et viri justus tolluntur,
et nemo considerat:
sublatus est Justus:
Et erit in pace memoria eius.
Tamquam agnus coram tondente se
obmutuit,
et non aperuit os suum:
de angustia,
et de iudicio sublatus est.

*When the Lord was buried,
they sealed up the tomb,
rolling a stone before the entrance to the
sepulchre: placing soldiers to guard it.
The chief priests went to Pilate
and petitioned him.*

*Behold how the just man dies,
and no one takes it to heart;
and just men are taken away,
and no one cares about it:
the just man has been taken away
from the face of iniquity:
and his memory shall be in peace.
He was as mute as a lamb before the shearer,
and he opened not his mouth:
he was taken away from anguish
and from judgement.*

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Agnus Dei Producer: Arthur Johnson
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