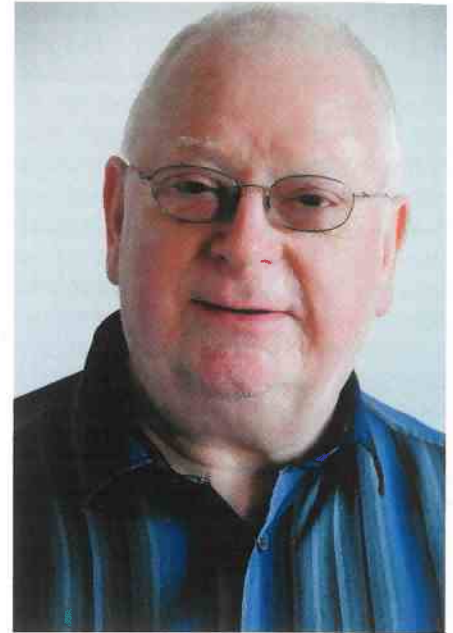


Julian Dawes premiere

A jubilant yet also reflective, meditative oratorio *Shirat Hayam* – The Song of the Sea – by British composer Julian Dawes was given a superb and highly enjoyable world premiere by the Aylith Choral Society, under their Musical Director Michael Etherton, with the Aylith Chamber Ensemble and Gemma Rosefield as cello soloist, on December 8. Warmly received by the capacity audience, *Shirat Hayam* is a thought-provoking large-scale setting of the poem from the *Book of Exodus* celebrating the crossing of the Red Sea, commissioned for the choir's 30th anniversary season. It represents the largest of a series of choral and solo vocal works on Biblical and Jewish themes, including the cantata *Ruth* and *Songs of Ashes*, a Holocaust song cycle by Julian Dawes, whose impressive output includes many theatrical, concertante, and chamber works. In *Shirat Hayam*, Dawes

counters the biblical text's overt triumphalism with a more personal element, expressed in eight cello solos interpreting Psalm verses, which precede each of eight choral-orchestral movements. The musical style combines many of the composer's hallmarks, zestful, jazzy and dance-like rhythms, plangent modal-tonal harmony, and telling lyricism that finds expression in high vocal tessituras and colourful choral spacings. Especially poignant were Gemma Rosefield's cellos solos which conveyed almost cantorial eloquence, occasionally reminiscent of the deep outpourings of Ernest Bloch. The cello's polyphony, use of left-hand pizzicato and often dance-like development of motifs, imbued each rounded miniatures with the character of a commentary, as a kind of Fiddler on the Roof contrasting the outward mood of the choruses. Confidently and colourfully projected by Aylith Choral Society, the choral movements developed a rich array of textures, from imitative jubilation in the



Julian Dawes

Photo: © JulianDawes.com

introductory lines of the song of praise, to majestic homophony and sharing and layering of melodic ideas in rhythmic textures reminiscent of Britten and a Bernstein. There is a balance of fast, sprightly, chirpy textures and more sustained passages, in which Dawes's word setting is highly responsive both to the accents of the Hebrew and the meaning of the text. Alongside amplification of the text are some radical reversals, as for instance in the 7th section, where the 'trembling' of the peoples of Edom, Moab and Canaan are evoked by empathy to suffering in a slow pastoral and lyrical mood. As a climax, the final episode features Gemma Rosefield's thrusting solo leading to an orchestral and choral rendition of the verse 'Hear o Israel', before the concluding section, a jaunty jig for orchestra and chorus that sandwiches a middle-eastern version characterisation of the 'Song of Miriam' for female semi-chorus flutes and tambourine, enhanced by hemiolas. The final chord is elusively minor, countering the perhaps overladen series of major cadences, keeping the text's triumphalism in check. The enthusiastic reception attested to the work's power and appeal.

Malcolm Miller



Musical Director: Neil Black OBE
 Founder: Geraint Jones
 Registered charity no. 1044438
 Registered in England no. 754916

Sarah Gordon Concert Management
 tel: 020 7586 5343 sarah.gordon@easynet.co.uk
 www.kirckman.org.uk

Wigmore Hall – 2014

Anna Huntley mezzo-soprano **3 January, 7.30pm**
Benjamin Appl baritone
James Baillieu piano, **James Cheung** piano
A commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the First World War

Jianing Kong piano **19 January, 7.30pm**
 Schubert, Bach, Chopin

The Busch Ensemble **27 March, 7.30pm**
 Beethoven, Bridge, Rihm, Ravel

Jonathan McGovern baritone **21 April, 7.30pm**
Tim Lowe cello
James Cheung piano, **James Baillieu** piano
 Programme to be confirmed

Y-Squared (Yelian He & Yasmin Rowe) **25 May, 7.30pm**
 Programme to be confirmed



36 Wigmore Street
 London W1U 2BP
 John Gilhooly Director
 The Wigmore Hall Trust
 Registered Charity No. 1024838

Tickets: £13 £11 £9 £8

bookable in advance from:
 Wigmore Hall Box Office

Tel: 020 7935 2141

Online bookings: www.wigmore-hall.org.uk



You can now follow us on Twitter at https://twitter.com/Musical_Opinion