

HOPE:

Offertorium (1861) *Afferentur Regi* Anton Bruckner (1824-1896)

*After her shall virgins be brought to the King;
with gladness and joy shall they be brought; and they shall enter the King's palace!*
[Psalm 45, vv. 14-15]

With zeal, vim and vigour, in both its text and its musical realisation, this opening motet is characteristic of its Austrian Romantic-era composer's musical spirit and style: sumptuous, mellifluous, and velutinous in its atmospheric choral sonority. As organist and teacher at St Florian Monastery in upper Austria, he furnished its ornate Baroque chapel with music eminently suitable for its size and lavish grandeur, such as this **Offertorium** (to be sung during the monetary collection at a religious service), *Afferentur regi* (companion motet to his similarly luscious **Ave Maria**), setting descriptive Latin text from the **Missa pro Virgine et Martyre** with determined yet humble fervour. Written in November 1861, it was premièred later that year on Santa Lucia's day, 13th December. Fond of it throughout his life, he regularly taught and directed it; dedicated it to his good friend and colleague, Johann Burgstaller, the choirmaster of the New Cathedral in nearby Linz (where it was also regularly requested); and quoted it in the *Credo* of his magisterial **Mass no. 1 in d minor** (1864).

Crafted in the brightly optimistic key of F major, and scored for the standard 4-part choir (comprising soprano, alto, tenor, and bass), it unusually includes an optional accompaniment from three trombones, to support and enrich its brief 38 bars' of growth and proclamation. In three short sections (in honour of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), it pays tribute to the origins of sacred choral music by opening with a familiar Mediaeval plainchant. Recalling Renaissance contrapuntal choral custom, it entwines each of its vocal parts (starting with the altos, then the tenors, next the basses, and finally introducing the sopranos) as equal but separate musical contributors (in a variety of aurally mirifical ways), reflecting the belief that everyone is both unique and of similar importance.

The Lamb (1982)

John Tavener (1944-2013)

A tender yet assured rendering of words by seminal Romantic English poet, William Blake (1757-1827) - *'far and away the greatest artist Britain has ever produced'* [Jonathan Jones] - The Lamb (from Blake's **Songs of Innocence and Experience**, first published in London in 1789) is an unaccompanied hymn-like Minimalist meditation, whose clearly evocative words and gently repetitive music are both at once expressive and creative; questioning and reassuring. Similarly, contrasting dualism permeates both text and musical language; both youth and old age; and both secular lamb and sacred symbol of Jesus.

Prolific, lauded and awarded contemporary English composer, much inspired generally by a myriad of influences global and historic (from ancient Greece to modern Europe; from Minimalism to Impressionism; from Mozart's opera, **The Magic Flute** to Contemporary Estonian composer, Arvo Pärt's choral music), John Tavener (who went to school with another popular English composer, John Rutter) *'read Blake's words and immediately heard the notes'*: an inspiration which resulted in a timeless symbiosis, *'with his very rare gift to bring an audience to a deep silence . . . writing the music he had to write.'*

Inspired specifically by both Blake's poetry and Tavener's family, **The Lamb** was written within 15 minutes (*'fully grown'*) during a car journey with his mother from Devon to London as a birthday present for his 3-year-old nephew, Simon, **The Lamb** was premièred in Winchester Cathedral; appeared on television and radio regularly from its first inclusion the same year it was written in the annual Carols from King's College, Cambridge service; and has featured in, for example, Sorrentino's thought-provoking 2013 art film of parallel binary contrasts, **The Great Beauty**.

Listen out for the choral chord (multiple different pitches sung simultaneously) on the word '*lamb*' (consisting of the notes A-C-G-B, from the bass upwards): a chord Tavener described as the '*joy-sorrow*' chord, the cornerstone of

*'music that, once heard, is never forgotten;
whose delicate radiance realises a rapt timelessness'.*

Lux Aeterna (2017)

Eriks Esenvalds (b. 1977)

*Let eternal light shine upon them, O Lord,
with your saints for ever, for you are merciful!
Grant them eternal rest, O Lord, and let eternal light shine upon them!*

Living Latvian musical legend, Esenvalds, is one of the most sought-after of contemporary composers, regularly commissioned for works - especially choral music - by choirs, orchestras, and patrons around the world. His motivational teaching has been harnessed by a fellowship at Trinity College, Cambridge, and the Latvian Academy of Music, where he was recently appointed head of composition. Global recognition for his music has resulted in international awards from Latvia to Philadelphia. Performances and recordings of his compositions have similarly traversed the globe from Birmingham to Boston; from New Zealand to America; from London to Berlin; and from Oxford to Cambridge; accruing top-billing successes on recording labels from Decca to Deutsche Grammophon; and from Hyperion to Naxos. His fusing of experiences from his copious conducting and teaching ventures imbues his compositions with stylish idiomaticism and finesse, unique colour, and indelible depth of expression (here indicated to be performed '*con anima*': with soul.)

Reviewed as being, '*a lush, warm and flowing setting of this sacred text in the way only Esenvalds can do it, [Lux aeterna] is absolutely stunning.*'

Lux aeterna ('Eternal light') recalls centuries-old Mediaeval and Renaissance choral practices of chanting the words for immediate attraction and mesmeric effect, complementing its traditional Latin text. Similarly Minimalist in its style (characterised by minimal subtle change and development of its ideas for maximum clarity and ease of understanding) to the preceding anthem by Tavener, Esenvalds's choral cameo, commissioned for the International Baltic Sea Choir Competition, has a luminosity and translucency that seem to evoke an artist's comfortingly-worn palette; emanating as light shining through stained-glass windows and merging and morphing infinitely effortlessly and peacefully.

Moment Musical in b minor, op. 16/3 (1897) S. V. Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

'What is music? How do you define it?

*Music is a calm moonlit night; a rustle of leaves in summer; a far-off peal of bells at dusk!
Music comes straight from the heart and talks to the heart; it is love . . .*

I compose music because I must give expression to my feelings and exalt . . . !'

Supple and subtle; euphoric and eudemonic; Rachmaninov's third **Moment Musical** is a paradigm of Russian Romantic piano utterances. Pervasively powerful, poetic and sublime, it has an improvisatory quality which helps spin its exploration of the deep sonorous depths of the piano with multifarious sonic hues. Its folk-like nature suggests a timelessness and indebtedness to the music of Schubert, which Rachmaninov loved, with its innately plangent and singable qualities. Although inspired by Schubert - as well as being a rêverie presaging the music of Debussy - it is indelibly the work of Rachmaninov:

'with exquisite melody, wondrous harmonic changes, and heavenly intensity.'

OPTIMISM:

In One Salutation (2017)

Eriks Esenvalds (b. 1977)

'For me, harmony is most important - how it flows and becomes a new harmony. The melodic line is secondary. Perhaps this is because my ear is trained primarily to perceive harmonies. Nevertheless I don't want to write simple music . . . it is important for me to create sounds I truly feel. I conclude that I am constantly changing, searching for new paths, but absolutely not, once having found them, mass producing them.'

Imbued with optimism, somewhat like an encouraging torch song (building in strength and determination, and rising in volume and pitch, throughout its course), this unaccompanied choral song reveals another side to Esenvalds's expressive musical dice. Setting a hope-rich poem by Bengali philosopher, poet and musician, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), **Salutation** embraces the unities of singers, sounds, spirits, and goals on its radiant journey. Commissioned by the National Youth Choir of Great Britain for six separate choral parts (expanding and enriching the customary four with an additional soprano - at the top - and bass parts - at the bottom - of the musical texture), it was first performed in Trinity College Chapel, Cambridge, in the summer of its creation. Its two-verse structure mirrors Tagore's symmetrically-balanced poem; both ending with a pandiculatory peroration to highlight its final iteration of the words, *'in one salutation to thee'*, and to signal its uplifting affirmative conclusion.

Ave Maria (1959)

Franz Biebl (1906-2001)

*The Angel of the Lord brought tidings to Mary, and she conceived by the Holy Ghost . . .
Mary said: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy Word" . . .*

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us . . .

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death! Amen.*

A German choral director, composer, and professor at the prestigious Mozarteum in Salzburg, Austria, Biebl confirmed his position in the international composing arena with this skilful and stirring masterpiece, commissioned by the fire department of Fürstenfeldbruck (near Munich) for their employees' choir, with a view to performing it in choral competitions and festivals, which they duly did.

A luxurious Romantic realisation of the famous '**Ave Maria**', it integrates the text of the hymn, '**Angelus Domini**' (a devotion describing the mystery of Christ's Incarnation as Jesus on earth) with the Marian antiphon refrain, '**Ave Maria**' (the traditional Roman-Catholic prayer for Mary's intercession on behalf of the penitent).

One of hundreds of settings of this important sacred text, this engaging unaccompanied choral motet has been championed and universally popularized by the all-male Californian vocal equivalent of The King's Singers, Chanticleer, as part of their regular repertoire in its original scoring for all male voices (TTBB, i.e. with two separate tenor and two discrete bass parts). Biebl later rescored it for different choral groupings to suit myriad choirs throughout the world, and has consequently sold well over half-a-million sheet-music copies to date! It is typical of his spine-tingling writing, strikingly rich in sonically-satisfying, closely-scored harmonies, which pre-echo a later secular barbershop style.

'Calmly flowing', it interleaves solo lines of the '**Angelus**' (delivered in the style of Gregorian plainchant: in this arrangement, first by unison basses; then by the altos; and finally by the sopranos), with a heart-wrenching full choral refrain. Its resplendent phrases rise and fall, ebb and flow, and intertwine in the manner of Renaissance choral music, as the tenors and basses repeatedly spar against the sopranos and altos: each with equal conviction and splendid consummation (features amplified even further in Biebl's highly-potent arrangement for brass band).

You'll Never Walk Alone (1945)

Richard Rodgers (1902-1979)

A prodigious American composer of Broadway hit numbers and shows, Rodgers left 43 complete musicals and over 900 songs, significantly impacting worldwide audiences, interest, fashion, and fellow composers of modern popular music, typically focussing on depth of characters and drama. Partnering equally prolific and productive lyricists, Rodgers wrote **You'll Never Walk Alone** in collaboration with his lifelong friend and colleague, Oscar Hammerstein II (1895-1960), with whom he created such trailblazing and enduring musicals as **Oklahoma**, **Carousel**, and **The Sound of Music**. His output has been recognised by the music, theatre, and entertainment industries, garnering a Tony, Oscar, Grammy, and Emmy, as well as a Pulitzer prize, and a Lifetime Achievement award in the arts from the Kennedy Center, Washington D.C., to name but an impressive few.

Born and brought up in the heart of American music and activity, New York, Rodgers learnt the piano from the age of 6, and started composing a few years later, before attending the Institute of Musical Art (now the world-famous Juilliard School) at Columbia University, through which he met librettists, Hart and Hammerstein, and discovered the music of Herbert and Kern, amongst much else, that were all to be potently formative influences on his musical language and legacy, including this ultimate emotion-stirring ear-worm, **You'll Never Walk Alone**.

A paradigm of Rodgers' oeuvre, considered '*to show the highest degree of consistent excellence, inventiveness, and sophistication*', this instantly-recognisable song originally featured in the 1945 Rodgers and Hammerstein show, **Carousel**, as Nettie (cousin of the protagonist, Julie), comforts and consoles her after her husband (the male lead, Billy) stabs himself and dies in her arms. This frequently chart-topping music continues to provide solace and hope, compassion and confidence, and has been championed as a stand-alone song by singers (as diverse as Elvis Presley, Marcus Mumford, Michael Ball, and Tom Jones) and groups (including Gerry and the Pacemakers); and as a rousing football-match tune (most notably, for Liverpool F.C., which has also used its summatory title as the epigraph to the Shankly Gates entrance of their home stadium, Anfield), as well as being the anthem of gratitude and encouragement sung weekly to honour and support the staff of the NHS and sufferers of Covid during the recent pandemic.

~ *interval* ~

DREAMS:

Wie liegt die Stadt so wüst (1945)

Rudolf Mauersberger (1889-1971)

*How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people? How is she become as a widow?
Great among the nations, princess among the provinces, how is she become a tributary?*

*The ways of Zion do mourn because none come to the solemn feasts;
all her gates are desolate; her priests sigh; her virgins are afflicted; and she is in bitterness.*

*From above hath he sent fire into my bones, and it prevaleth against them;
he spread a net for my feet; he turned me back; he made me desolate and faint all the day.
Clapping their hands, they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying,
"Is this the city that men call the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?"*

*For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim;
"Wherefore dost thou forget us forever, and forsake us so long a time?
Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old;
remember, O Lord, what is come upon us; consider, and behold our reproach!"*

[from the Book of the Lamentations of Jeremiah]

Mauersberger was a German-renowned composer and choir-master from Saxony, who lived and worked in its artistically-rich and widely-active capital city of Dresden. Imbued in the nineteenth-century German tradition of the music of Schumann, Brahms and Mendelssohn, Mauersberger followed their Romantic ideals and stylistic choral writing, as well his other predilection for older Mediaeval musical styles, including clear and powerful hypnotic chant-like tunes and haunting starkness and timelessness, as this mournful example beautifully typifies.

Written in response to the devastating second-world-war bombing of Dresden in February 1945, this profound choral utterance was intended as part of a bigger, more substantial **Dresden Requiem** (a Catholic mass for the dead). Another ExeVox favourite, this funereal motet is deeply moving, harmonically poignant, compellingly structured, gloriously phrased, and purposefully rhythmically driven to its final zenith.

Originally composed a few weeks after the bombing (over Easter weekend 1945), this commemorative musical elegy has subsequently been ritually performed by the Dresden Kreuzchor each year on the anniversary of the first day of the attack. It was primarily inspired by the biblical verses from the Old Testament he chose to set here to music (referring to both the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and to the age-old futility of war), as well as being a personal act of memorialisation for

Mauersberger (who lost many friends and acquaintances during the Dresden bombing). **Wie liegt die Stadt so wüst** thus functions, as music so often and uniquely can, as a transcendent contemplation of this and other life-taking atrocities; as well as being a powerfully personal and public cathartic release of emotions through music.

Once in a While (1937)

Michael Edwards (1893-1962)

Best-known for this 1937 chart-topping '*great ballade*', **Once in a While** - which has since become a classic jazz standard - Edwards - '*the perfect example of a one-hit composer*' - was an American violinist, organist, arranger, and composer, active in his homeland throughout his life. His collaboration with lyricist, Bud Green (1897-1981), resulted in this song, which instantly shot to pole-position of popularity around the world, and enjoyed recordings from Tommy Dorsey's original to Louis Armstrong's in 1937; from Patti Page in 1952 to Ella Fitzgerald in 1968; from Bing Crosby to Liza Minnelli's memorable versions; instrumental versions by the likes of Nat 'King' Cole, John Coltrane, and Dizzie Gillespie; and from renditions by the Chimes in 1960 to Cleo Laine in 1986.

A fluid lugubrious number, it unusually capitalises on a recurrent triplet hook (i.e. three equal-length notes, as in the syllables of 'straw-ber-ry') in each of its convincingly-balanced sinuous phrases. Its instant captivation is further enhanced by its unexpectedly chromatic harmonies (incorporating additional notes outside its fundamental key for extra colour, flavour, and fragrance).

In this a-cappella arrangement, each of its four customary choral voice parts move together (somewhat like a non-sacred hymn) both to optimise clarity and epitomise unity of spirit, sound, and hopeful intent.

In four short sections (A-A-B-A) followed by a short contemplative coda (ending), its bridge (linking 'B' section) reaches its apogee melodically, harmonically, and emotionally at its most optimistic words:

*'in love's smouldering ember, one spark may remain,
if love still can remember, the spark may burn again',*

before closing with its oft-repeated refrain, '*once in a while . . .*'.

Sure on this Shining Night, op.13/3 (1940) Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

Barber was a thoughtful American pianist, conductor, educator, and composer. As the eminent music critic, Donal Henahan evaluated: '*probably no other American composer has ever enjoyed such early, such persistent, and such long-lasting acclaim*', as substantiated in such distinctive, exquisite, and heartfelt music as this song: one of Barber's life-long favourites.

Typically sensitive and accessible, **Sure on this Shining Night** is rooted in the nineteenth-century musical traditions of Romantic musical expression, lilting lyricism, and harmonic euphony (with its choral chords flowing effortlessly and inextricably one to the next - '*mysterious, compelling, and sonically fulfilling*' - like another of his trademark works, the peacefully perennial **Adagio for Strings**), with conversational interplay between the singers and the pianist (as in the Lieder/German art songs of Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms, reflecting many another parallel with their compositional styles, too).

Originally conceived as an art song for solo voice and piano in 1938 (as the third of four pieces in his op. 13 song cycle, first published in 1940), this shimmering musical snapshot was reimagined for SATB choir with piano by Barber in 1961, drawing deeply on personal poetic text (**Descriptions of Elysium**) by his friend, James Agee (1909-1955), about looking up to the astral skies after both his parents died in a car accident, believing they were shining down as stars protecting him throughout his life. '*Overwhelming yet . . . calming, tranquil, and contemplative*', Agee's intimate text is masterfully resonated in Barber's serene music, which is further distinguished by: '*awe-filled melody soaring atop smooth, peaceful harmonies, which together evoke a sense of wonder and gratitude.*'

Surrounded by music from birth, Barber was fascinated with the voice and songs, in particular, as his maternal aunt, Louise Homer, was a celebrated contralto soloist at New York's Metropolitan Opera House, and introduced him to an invaluable wealth of vocal music and eminent singers, whom he subsequently composed for and accompanied in recitals. Indeed, voice-and-piano songs account for around two-thirds of his complete compositional accomplishments. Like most of the composers featured in tonight's musical programme, Barber received numerous coveted awards and prizes for his music, including the Rome Prize, two Pulitzer Prizes, and the Gold Medal for Music from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, where he was later elected as an honorary fellow.

As Barber wrote: '*when I'm writing music for words, then I immerse myself in those words, and I let the music flow out of them . . . I just go on doing, as they say, my thing. I believe this takes a certain courage*'.

Home, Sweet Home (arr. 1998)

Henry Bishop, arr. Chilcott (b. 1955)

Also writing in a thoroughly appealing and fashionable nineteenth-century Romantic idiom, Sir Henry Rowley Bishop (1787-1855) completed over a hundred operas, operettas, cantatas and ballets, as well as a wide assortment of single musical works - including his now ubiquitous **Home, Sweet Home** - primarily for theatres in London (from the Royal Opera House to the Haymarket), and Oxford (where he was appointed chief Heather Professor of Music at its world-renowned university) and Edinburgh (where he was later appointed Reid Professor of Music at its illustrious university). A fitting memorial for Bishop is his inclusion on the composers' section of the magnificent Frieze of Parnassus designed by George Gilbert Scott on the Albert Memorial, Kensington Gardens, London.

With its instant appeal and easy memorability, **Home, Sweet Home** has travelled the globe (interestingly as 'My Humble Cottage' in its Japanese translation) in many guises (such as partnering 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow' when sung by Judy Garland in the film version of the musical, **The Wizard of Oz**) and incarnations (often alongside **Auld Lang Syne**), from its original format as a 'Sicilian Air' to the condensed and compressed parlour ballade (especially appreciated and increasingly familiar in America during their 1861-1865 civil war), as sung and played by singers and instrumentalists today, with its homely lyrics by an American author, John Howard Payne (1791-1852) - '*there's no place like home!*' - ensuring on-going profits for its creators, sheet-music publishers and singers - from Vera Lynn and Bing Crosby to Katherine Jenkins - alike.

Composers from Sweden to Italy - and from America to England - have quoted it in their works (from a concerto for bassoon and orchestra to Sir Henry Wood's **Fantasia on British Sea Songs**, the latter being so popular, that it is performed at every Last Night of the Proms in the Royal Albert Hall - and other venues - each year, with copious audience participation).

Former King's Singer tenor, and current composer, educator, and arranger, Bob Chilcott (heralding from Plymouth), arranged **Home, Sweet Home** for a-cappella

choir in 1998. It is this version which features in tonight's concert, sharing its cosy melody between each of the four choral voice parts, with ethereal chordal backing from the voices not carrying the tune (listen out especially for the final phrase sumptuously satisfyingly echoed by the tenors).

Image Oubliée No. 1 (1894)

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

This opening '*Forgotten Picture*' encapsulates and embodies Debussy's myriad beliefs, which include the following epigrams:

*'my music travels from the shadows of silence back into silence . . .
... music is a dream from which the veils have been lifted . . .
... it's not even the expression of a feeling - it's the feeling itself . . .
... pleasure is the only law . . .
... music is a mysterious mathematical process, whose elements are a part of infinity . . .
... music exists to express the inexpressible . . .
... music begins where words are powerless to express any more . . .
... music is the fantasy of dreams . . .'*

As a pianist first and foremost, fondest of performing and teaching, Debussy met and taught two daughters of his friend, the French Impressionist painter, Henry Lerolle; and it was for his eldest daughter, Yvonne (the pianist also famously photographed and painted at the piano by contemporaneous artists, Degas and Renoir), that Debussy composed several pieces of piano music, including a set of three **Images Oubliées** ('*Forgotten Images*', as they remained unpublished during Debussy's lifetime, only surfacing on the public stage when they were first printed and circulated in 1977). The second reappeared as the **Sarabande** in his triptych **Suite Pour le Piano**, and the third as **Jardins Sous la Pluie** in **Estampes** (another trilogy of characterfully evocative piano solos); but it is the first which is the most amazing, atmospheric, sensuous, and uniquely and wholly Debussyian.

All three of these 'forgotten' musical images - aptly described by Debussy as '*conversations between the piano and oneself*' (i.e. the player) - are abundant in distinct beautiful imagery. But, as the eminent Debussy expert, pianist Roy Howat, succinctly wrote: '*for sheer expressive beauty, the untitled opening piece is almost unsurpassed in Debussy's output, and its closing cadence echoes the end of the first scene of his later opera, Pelléas et Mélisande [1902], as well as foreshadows the end of La soirée dans Grenade (the second musical picture of his Estampes of 1903)*'.

GLOBAL COURAGE:

El Hambo (1997)

Jaakko Mäntyjärvi (b. 1963)

From France to Finland, and from dreamy impressions at the piano to vivid visceral sounds from an unaccompanied choir imitating the sound of tuning folk fiddles and cheerful meaningless scat text ('*amusing imitations of the vowel sounds of any Scandinavian language except Danish*', with both humorous and colourful effects) comes Mäntyjärvi's foot-tapping, finger-clicking, smile-inducing **El Hambo** (the *hambo* being a lively modern Swedish folk dance). A professional translator as well as a classical composer, Mäntjärvi entitled this unaccompanied musical firework with two words which encompass several meanings from '*the ultimate hambo to end all hambos*', and '*electric hambo*' (both in Swedish); to '*the jump of joy*' (in Welsh); and '*the boyfriend*' (in Catalan).

A Finnish graduate in linguistics as well as musicology from the University of Helsinki, Mäntjärvi specialised, as a singer, in choral conducting and composition at the Sibelius Academy, publishing well over 150 choral works to date. Describing himself as '*an eclectic traditionalist*', his music focuses on practical and traditional traits, ensuring its accessibility and rapid appeal, as this optimistic example reveals. His music is increasingly performed and recorded by both amateur and professional groups around the world, encouraged by regular talks, lectures, and workshops on his music, its background, and tips to performance.

The second work in a choral trilogy entitled, '**Justly Forgotten Peoples**', **El Hambo** is remarkably reminiscent of folk dancing and singing, punctuated with foot stamping, hand clapping, and joyful shouting for extra panache, all adding to its popularity as one of the best-selling pieces of Finnish music of all time.

Although primarily in the triple time (three beats per bar) of a Swedish *hambo* dance, **El Hambo** frequently slides into duple-time measures (two beats per bar) with witty, energy-enhancing, momentum-increasing results, keeping singers and audiences very much awake! It was inspired, in part, by Norwegian, Finnish, and Swedish choral folk songs and dance, as well as by the whacky eccentric Swedish chef in The Muppet Show! Commissioned by the Cantinovum Chamber Choir of Jyväskylä, Finland, it was premiered in June 1997, and remains an oft-requested and repeated core of their repertoire.

Headed to be performed '*with a jolly Scandinavian smile*', **El Hambo** opens with the sound of a violinist tuning its strings - as represented by all the singers - and also features vocal drones akin to the sound of a hurdy-gurdy/bagpipe.

'Hei jäkkä däkkä düüidi aadi!'

Geographical Fugue (1950) *solo quartet* Ernst Toch (1887-1964)

Continuing tonight's musical travels of hope, optimism, dreams and courage around the world, and throughout time, ExeVox's programme now reaches a unique seminal paradigm of *Sprechgesang*: music solely spoken rather than sung. Featuring just four performers (one per part), it is thus scored in meticulous copious detail for speaking chorus. Starting with the tenor, countries, towns, lakes, landmarks, and cities (whose words were chosen for their inherent rhythm and percussive sounds) are introduced in rapid succession. In the style of a musical fugue (akin to a complex musical canon, like '*London's burning!*'), the alto voice then repeats the tenor's opening entry, duly followed by the soprano's version, and finally by the bass's reaffirmation; all four voices building tempestuously en route to a gigantically eruptive unison climax in '*Trinidad*'!

Toch was an innovative avant-garde Austrian composer of contemporary music and film scores, equally qualified in philosophy and medicine as well as music. Strongly indebted to the traditions of his native Vienna (most notably that of its golden child, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart), Toch collected numerous prizes (including a Pulitzer) for his plethora of compositions (from operas to film scores; and piano solos to choral music), both throughout Europe and in America, where he lived and worked from East to West coasts.

One of his innovations was for '*Gesprochene Musik*' ('*Spoken Music*'), of which this **Geographical Fugue** is the finest and most-performed example. It towers as the third and last movement of a suite written for - and first recorded at - the 1930 Berlin Festival of Contemporary Music. Originally written in German, it will be delivered tonight in its composer's own English translation.

Toch's experimental intention was that the performers should be recorded reciting his score, and the subsequent performance be achieved by playing the recording at ever-increasing speeds: '*from highly-structured order to babbling chaos . . . like*

simultaneous conversations of human voices intruding upon your consciousness at social gatherings'. Thus heightening both its velocity, energy, and pitch, it miraculously conjures more instrumental than vocal sonorities, and greatly impressed all those present at its première, including the most radical of American avant-garde composers, John Cage.

Viva la Musica! (1988)

Iván Eröd (1936-2019)

Hungarian by birth and education, Eröd studied at the country's top Franz Liszt Academy of Music as a pianist and composer, before emigrating to Austria in 1956, where he continued his musical voyage at the Vienna Music Academy, collecting awards for his performing and composing right across Europe, before settling into life as a professor of music composition first in Graz and then in Vienna.

With clear roots in his Hungarian heritage, the music of fellow Hungarians, Bartók and Kodály, provided great inspiration to his own writing. From small-scale instrumental chamber music to larger-scale operas, his output is as widespread as his range of styles (spanning from laid-back jazz idioms to more cerebral and meticulously-notated serialism).

A brief 20-bar-long unaccompanied choral paean, **Viva la Musica!** begins with the basses setting up an oft-repeated 2-bar ostinato with jaunty rhythms and surprising accents. They are soon joined by the tenors, who enter a fifth higher than the basses (doubling their music in a manner reminiscent of age-old Mediaeval choral music), before the sopranos and altos triumphantly enter and drive forward together as a determined duo with identical rhythms, performance markings, and text. All four voice parts emphatically unite with the final explosion of the text of its title followed by a whole paused bar of silence . . .

What better way to end tonight's concert, celebrating and affirming the positive power and strength of music, than its titular Latin words, which mean:

'Long live music!'

ENCORE:

Now is the Hour (1913)

Clement Scott (1841-1904)

*Now is the hour for me to say goodbye;
Soon you'll be sailing far across the sea;
While you're away, oh, please, remember me;
When you return you'll find me waiting here!*

Macaronically using both original Maori and its modern English translation, this unaccompanied choral version of an eminently familiar tune - which was conceived just over 100 years ago by a prominent English-theatre critic, playwright, lyricist, writer, and translator - will no doubt become another pleasing ear worm! As well as penning this translation of a well-known Maori farewell song (used as an optimistic adieu to Maori soldiers courageously going to fight in the First World War), Scott also wrote this folk-style tune after an inspirational tour of New Zealand, such that many New Zealanders believe it to be an original Maori melody, even though it was originally misleadingly entitled, **Swiss Cradle Song!**

Now is the Hour has been championed by a multitude of singers from Gracie Fields to Kiri Te Kanawa; frequently affectionately performed by Bing Crosby; and was even sung at the closing match of the 2011 Rugby World Cup. It thus ideally summates and epitomises tonight's programme of music of hope, courage, dreams, and optimism.