

THE ARTISTS

Alex Potter

COUNTERTENOR

Thomas Hobbs

TENOR

Alexander Weimann

PIANO

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VANCOUVER BACH FESTIVAL 2018

WEDNESDAY AUGUST 8 AT 1:00 PM | CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL

BRITTEN - ABRAHAM AND ISAAC

— THIS PROGRAMME WILL BE PERFORMED WITHOUT AN INTERVAL —

Benjamin Britten

(1913–1967)

Canticle I:

"My beloved is mine and I am his", Op. 40
tenor & piano

"Sweeter than Roses"

(by Henry Purcell, arranged by Benjamin Britten)
countertenor & piano

"Man is for a women made"

(by Henry Purcell, arranged by Benjamin Britten)
tenor & piano

"In vain the am'rous flute"

(by Henry Purcell, arranged by Benjamin Britten)
countertenor, tenor & piano

"Night Piece"

notturmo for piano solo

"The Bold Grenadier"

(traditional folk song)
countertenor, unaccompanied

"The Salley Gardens"

(traditional folk song, arranged by Benjamin Britten)
countertenor & piano

"The Foggy Foggy Dew"

(traditional folk song, arranged by Benjamin Britten)
tenor & piano

"I Dreamed a Dream the Other Night"

(traditional folk song)
countertenor, unaccompanied

Canticle II:

"Abraham and Isaac", Op. 51
countertenor, tenor & piano

PROGRAMME NOTES

BY ALEX POTTER

A British person looking at a map of Vancouver might be forgiven for expecting it to be a sort of Britannic home-away-from-home: names like Granville Island, English Bay Beach, and Nelson Street seem more like the ghosts of a vanished British-imperial past, incongruous to the contemporary reality of this beautiful, dynamic Pacific metropolis. The presence of the Victorian neo-gothic Christ Church Cathedral, nestled amongst the skyscrapers, is therefore even more surprising and touching. The Cathedral has an intimate grandeur combined with the cosiness of a parish church. It is the kind of building in which Benjamin Britten would have felt perfectly at home, and a most fitting venue for his music.

Britten's dominance of the music scene in the latter half of the twentieth century might lead to the impression that his music is "typically British" but the reality is more complex and international than this. He once listed his own principal influences as Monteverdi, Purcell, Bach, Gluck, Mozart, Weber, Schubert, Mahler, Berg, Stravinsky and "even Tchaikovsky, if he is played in a restrained, though vital way". To this one can certainly add Schönberg and his teacher Frank Bridge. By contrast, Britten showed disdain for the leading British composers of the day, proclaiming himself "absolutely incapable of enjoying Elgar, for more than 2 minutes." He also abhorred Vaughan Williams and the pastoralist school, which makes his decision to arrange folksongs all the more puzzling. Yet it would seem Britten decided to set the songs in a manner consciously opposite to that of the pastoralists, as Britten specialist Philip Brett puts it:

"Unlike Cecil Sharp and Vaughan Williams, who assigned an idealized, essential artistic quality to the melodies which their accompaniments were thought to reflect, Britten recognized that the venue changed the genre and turned them in effect into lieder or art-song, and proceeded brilliantly on that premise."

Despite altering the nature of these traditional songs, Britten's arrangements manage to amplify the meaning and beauty of the texts, something that he achieves to even greater effect in his original compositions. His exquisite word-setting, wonderfully displayed in Canticum I, is a direct result of his study and arranging of Purcell in the early 1940s. As he himself



Benjamin Britten (1948 photo)

put it, "almost the greatest importance of Purcell for us to-day is the example of his prosody. Here surely is the way to make the English language live again in song." Developing these ideas, Britten then championed the cause of English-language opera and founded the English Opera Group in 1947. Canticum II, written as a fundraiser for the group in 1952, is a dramatic masterpiece in miniature, expertly playing out the tension between and fears of the two protagonists. Setting the words of God for two voices and arpeggiating piano accompaniment is a stroke of genius. God becomes mystical yet familiar, powerful yet approachable, paradoxes also reflected in the character of this church; text, Britten's music and architecture conjoin here in perfect harmony. ■

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Alex Potter countertenor

Described as a “rising star of the countertenor world”, Alex Potter is a sought-after interpreter of seventeenth and eighteenth-century music. He has performed with conductors including Philippe Herreweghe, Thomas Hengelbrock, Lars Ulrik Mortensen, Jos van Veldhoven, Peter Neumann, Paul Goodwin and Frieder Bernius.

After beginning his musical career as a chorister at Southwark Cathedral, Alex Potter was a Choral Scholar and read Music at New College, Oxford. He then went on to pursue further study in singing and baroque performance practice at the Schola Cantorum in Basel with Gerd Türk, taking additional classes with Evelyn Tubb.

Recent performances of note include the title role Handel’s *Solomon* with Stephen Layton and The Holst Singers, Bach’s *St. John Passion* with Manfred Honeck and the Stuttgart Symphony Orchestra, a solo recital at the Utrecht Early Music Festival, Bach’s *B-Minor Mass* at the Salzburger Festspiele with Collegium 1704 and Václav Luks, several tours with music by J.S. Bach and Henry Purcell under Philippe Herreweghe and Collegium Vocale Gent, and Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater* with Archangelo and Jonathan Cohen in Dresden.

Alex Potter has a large discography with several different ensembles. His most recent solo CD – *Fede e Amor* – of Viennese Baroque Music for alto voice and obbligato trombones was released in 2014 on the Ramée label. He also features on the newly released recording of Bach’s *B-Minor Mass* with Concerto Copenhagen and Lars Ulrik Mortensen, which was Editor’s Choice in Gramophone Magazine.

He lives in the Lüneburger Heath region of Germany with his wife and two daughters. When not singing, he enjoys baking bread, restoring his half-timbered house, and growing vegetables in the garden with varying degrees of success.

Thomas Hobbs tenor

Thomas Hobbs is in demand with many leading baroque and early music ensembles, appearing throughout Europe and the US as a soloist in key works from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.

Current and future engagements include Haydn’s *Creation* with Israel Camerata in Jerusalem and with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, tours with Collegium Vocale Gent, and Bach cantatas, Mass in B Minor, and Easter Oratorio with the Nederlandse Bachvereniging. Hobbs will also sing Bach with the Musikpodium Stuttgart, and Monteverdi Vespers with the Academy of Ancient Music.

Recent concert performances include Damon in *Acis and Galatea* with Dunedin Consort, Bach cantatas with the Nederlandse Bachvereniging and Ensemble Pygmalion, Bach’s Christmas Oratorio with the Tonkünstler-Orchester Niederösterreich, Tonhalle Orchester Zürich and Le Concert Lorrain. Hobbs has also sung Evangelist in the Bach St Matthew Passion and St John Passion with the Choir of King’s College, Cambridge.

Hobbs’s operatic roles include a critically acclaimed Telemachus

in *The Return of Ulysses* in a new production for English National Opera conducted by Jonathan Cohen, Apollo and Shepherd in Monteverdi’s *Orfeo* in semi-staged performances with Richard Egarr and the Academy of Ancient Music, the title role in *Albert Herring* and Ferrando in *Così fan tutte*. Also a keen recitalist, Hobbs’ recent highlights include performing Brett Dean’s *Winter Songs* at the Cheltenham Festival, Vaughan Williams’s *On Wenlock Edge* with the Edinburgh Quartet, Schubert’s *Die Schöne Müllerin*, Schumann’s *Liederkreis*, Op.39 and a recital of Mozart songs at London’s Kings Place.

Born in Exeter, Thomas Hobbs studied at the Royal College of Music under the tutelage of Neil Mackie, where he was awarded the RCM Peter Pears and Mason scholarships, and at the Royal Academy of Music under Ryland Davies, where he held a Kohn Bach Scholarship in addition to a full entrance scholarship. He was also a member of the prestigious Académie at the Aix-en-Provence Festival, where he performed in concert with Louis Langrée and the Camerata Salzburg.

Alexander Weimann piano

Alexander Weimann is one of the most sought-after ensemble directors, soloists, and chamber music partners of his generation. After traveling the world with ensembles like Tragicomedia, and as frequent guest with Cantus Cölln, the Freiburger Barockorchester, Gesualdo Consort and Tafelmusik, he now focuses on his activities as conductor of the Pacific Baroque Orchestra in Vancouver, Music Director of the Seattle Baroque Orchestra and regular guest conductor of ensembles including the Les Violons du Roy, Symphony Nova Scotia, Arion Baroque Orchestra in Montreal and the Portland Baroque Orchestra.

Weimann was born in 1965 in Munich, where he studied the organ, church music, musicology (with a summa con laude thesis on Bach’s secco recitatives), theatre, mediæval Latin, and jazz piano, supported by a variety of federal scholarships. From 1990 to 1995, Weimann taught music theory, improvisation, and Jazz at the Munich Musikhochschule. Since 1998, he has been giving master classes in harpsichord and historical performance practice at institutions such as Lunds University in Malmö and the Bremen Musikhochschule, and at North American universities such as The University of California in Berkeley, Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, McGill in Montreal, and Mount Allison in New Brunswick. Since 2007, he has conducted several acclaimed opera productions at the Amherst Early Music Festival. He now teaches at the University of British Columbia and directs the Baroque Orchestra Mentorship Programme there.

A multiple Juno and Grammy nominee, Weimann can be heard on some 100 CDs. Recent highlights include an Opus and Juno award winning CD of Handel oratorio arias with soprano Karina Gauvin, a recording of Bach’s *St. John’s Passion* with Les Voix Baroques/Arion Baroque Orchestra, and a Juno nominated recording of Handel’s *Orlando* with the Pacific Baroque Orchestra that was also awarded a Gramophone Editor’s Choice award.

Alex lives with his wife, three children and pets in Ladner BC, and tries to spend as much time as possible in his garden.

Canticle I:

"My beloved is mine and I am his", Op. 40

tenor & piano

Ev'n like two little divided brooks,
That wash the pebbles with their wanton streams,
And having rang'd and search'd a thousand nooks,
Meet both at length at silver-breasted Thames,
Where in a greater current they conjoin:
So I my best-beloved's am; so he is mine.

Ev'n so we met; and after long pursuit,
Ev'n so we joy'n'd; we both became entire;
No need for either to renew a suit,
For I was flax and he was flames of fire:
Our firm-united souls did more than twine;
So I my best-beloved's am; so he is mine.

If all those glitt'ring Monarchs that command
The servile quarters of this earthly ball,
Should tender, in exchange, their shares of land,
I would not change my fortunes for them all:
Their wealth is but a counter to my coin:
The world's but theirs; but my beloved's mine.

Nor Time, nor Place, nor Chance, nor Death can bow
My least desires unto the least remove;
He's firmly mine by oath; I his by vow;
He's mine by faith; and I am his by love;
He's mine by water; I am his by wine,
Thus I my best-beloved's am; thus he is mine.

He is my Altar; I, his Holy Place;
I am his guest; and he, my living food;
I'm his by penitence; he mine by grace;
I'm his by purchase; he is mine, by blood;
He's my supporting elm; and I his vine;
Thus I my best beloved's am; thus he is mine.

He gives me wealth; I give him all my vows:
I give him songs; he gives me length of dayes;
With wreaths of grace he crowns my longing brows,
And I his temples with a crown of Praise,
Which he accepts: an everlasting signe,
That I my best-beloved's am; that he is mine.

"Sweeter than Roses"

(by Henry Purcell, arranged by Benjamin Britten)

countertenor & piano

Sweeter than roses, or cool evening breeze
On a warm flowery shore, was the dear kiss,
First trembling made me freeze,
Then shot like fire all o'er.
What magic has victorious love!
For all I touch or see since that dear kiss,
I hourly prove, all is love to me.

"Man is for a women made"

(by Henry Purcell, arranged by Benjamin Britten)

tenor & piano

Man is for the woman made,
And the woman made for man;
As the spur is for the jade,
As the scabbard for the blade,
As for digging is the spade,
As for liquor is the can,
So man is for the woman made,
And the woman made for man.

As the scepter to be sway'd,
As for night's the serenade,
As for pudding is the pan,
And to cool us is the fan,
So man is for the woman made,
And the woman made for man.

Be she widow, wife or maid,
Be she wanton, be she stayed,
Be she well or ill array'd,
Whore, bawd or harridan,
Yet man is for the woman made,
And the woman made for man.

"In vain the am'rous flute"

(by Henry Purcell, arranged by Benjamin Britten)

countertenor, tenor & piano

In vain the am'rous flute and soft guitar
Jointly labour to inspire
Wanton heat and loose desire,
Whilst those chaste airs do gently move
Seraphic flames and heav'nly love.

"Night Piece"

notturmo for piano solo

"The Bold Grenadier"

(traditional folk song)

countertenor, unaccompanied

As I was a walking one morning in May
I spied a young couple a makin' of hay.
O one was a fair maid and her beauty shone clear
and the other was a soldier, a bold grenadier.

Good morning, good morning, good morning said he
O where are you going my pretty lady?
I'm a going a walking by the clear crystal stream
to see cool water glide and hear nightingales sing.

O soldier, o soldier, will you marry me?
O no, my sweet lady that never can be.
For I've got a wife at home in my own country,
Two wives and the army's too many for me

"The Salley Gardens"

(traditional folk song, arranged by Benjamin Britten)

countertenor & piano

Down by the Salley Gardens my love and I did meet;
She passed the Salley Gardens with little snow-white feet.
She bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the tree;
But I, being young and foolish, with her did not agree.

In a field by the river my love and I did stand,
And on my leaning shoulder she laid her snow-white hand.
She bid me take life easy, as the grass grows on the weirs;
But I was young and foolish, and now am full of tears.

Text by William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)

Note: "salley" is an anglicized form of the Irish word "saileach", which means willow.

"The Foggy Foggy Dew"

(traditional folk song, arranged by Benjamin Britten)

tenor & piano

When I was a bachelor I lived all alone
and worked at the weaver's trade
And the only, only thing that I ever did wrong,
was to woo a fair young maid.
I wooed her in the winter time, and in the summer too . . .
And the only, only thing I did that was wrong
was to keep her from the foggy, foggy dew.

One night she came to my bedside when I lay fast asleep,
She laid her head upon my bed and she began to weep.
She sighed, she cried, she damn'd near died,
she said: "What shall I do?"
So I hauled her into bed and I covered up her head,
just to keep her from the foggy, foggy dew.

Oh, I am a bachelor and I live with my son,
and we work at the weaver's trade.
And ev'ry single time that I look into his eyes,
he reminds me of the fair young maid.
He reminds me of the winter time, and of the summer too,
And of the many, many times that I held her in my arms,
just to keep her from the foggy, foggy dew.

"I Dreamed a Dream the Other Night"

(traditional folk song)

countertenor, unaccompanied

I dreamed a dream the other night
Lowlands, lowlands away my John
I dreamed a dream the other night
Lowlands away.

My love came in all dressed in white
Lowlands, lowlands away my John
My love came in all dressed in white
Lowlands away.

No sound she made, no word she said
Lowlands, lowlands away my John
No sound she made, no word she said
Lowlands away.

Tw'as then I knew my love was dead
Lowlands, lowlands away my John
Tw'as then I knew my love was dead
Lowlands away.

Please turn page quietly, and only after the music has ended.

Canticle II: "Abraham and Isaac"

God speaks (*tenor and alto together*):

Abraham, my servant, Abraham,
Take Isaac, thy son by name,
That thou lovest the best of all,
And in sacrifice offer him to me
Upon that hill there besides thee.

Abraham, I will that so it be,
For aught that may befall.

Abraham:

My Lord, to Thee is mine intent
Ever to be obedient.
That son that Thou to me hast sent
Offer I will to Thee.
Thy bidding done shall be.

Here Abraham, turning him to his son Isaac, saith:

Make thee ready, my dear darling,
For we must do a little thing.
This woode do on thy back it bring,
We may no longer abide.
A sword and fire that I will take,
For sacrifice behoves me to make;
God's bidding will I not forsake,
But ever obedient be.

Here Isaac speaketh to his father, and taketh a bundle of sticks and beareth after his father, and saith:

Isaac:

Father, I am all ready
To do your bidding most meekely,
And to bear this wood full [bayn]* am I, * bayn = willing
As you commanded me.

(Here they both go to the place to do sacrifice)

Abraham:

Now, Isaac son, go we our way
To yonder mount if that we may.

Isaac:

My dear father, I will essay
To follow you full fain.

Abraham being minded to slay his son Isaac, lifts up his hands, and saith the following:

Abraham:

O! My heart will break in three,
To hear thy words I have pitye;
As Thou wilt, Lord, so must it be,
To Thee I will be bayn.
Lay down thy faggot, my own son dear.

Isaac:

All ready, father, lo it is here.
But why make you such heavy cheer?
Are you anything adread?

Abraham:

Ah! Dear God! That me is woe!

Isaac:

Father, if it be your will,
Where is the beast that we shall kill?

Abraham:

Thereof, son, is none upon this hill.

Isaac:

Father, I am full sore affeared
To see you bear that drawne sword.

Abraham:

Isaac, son, peace, I pray thee,
Thou breakest my heart even in three.

Isaac:

I pray you, father, [layn]* nothing from me, * layn = hiding
But tell me what you think.

Abraham:

Ah! Isaac, Isaac, I must thee kill!

Isaac:

Alas! Father, is that your will,
Your owne child for to spill
Upon this hilles brink?
If I have trespassed in any degree
With a yard you may beat me;
Put up your sword, if your will be,
For I am but a child.
Would God my mother were here with me!
She would kneel down upon her knee,
Praying you, father, if it may be,
For to save my life.

Abraham:

O Isaac, son, to thee I say
God hath commanded me today
Sacrifice, this is no nay,
To make of thy bodye.

Isaac:

Is it God's will I shall be slain?

Abraham:

Yea, son, it is not for to layn.

>

Here Isaac asketh his father's blessing on his knees, and saith:

Isaac:

Father, seeing you must needs do so,
Let it pass lightly and over go;
Kneeling on my knees two,
Your blessing on me spread.

Abraham:

My blessing, dear son, give I thee
And thy mother's with heart free.
The blessing of the Trinity,
My dear Son, on thee light.

Here Isaac riseth and cometh to his father, and he taketh him, and bindeth and layeth him upon the altar to sacrifice him, and saith:

Come hither, my child, thou art so sweet,
Thou must be bound both hands and feet.

Isaac:

Father, do with me as you will,
I must obey, and that is skill,
God's commandment to fulfil,
For needs so it must be.

Abraham:

Isaac, Isaac, blessed must thou be.

Isaac:

Father, greet well my brethren ying,
And pray my mother of her blessing,
I come no more under her wing,
Farewell for ever and aye.

Abraham:

Farewell, my sweet son of grace!

Here Abraham doth kiss his son Isaac, and binds a kerchief about his head.

Isaac:

I pray you, father, turn down my face,
For I am sore adread.

Abraham:

Lord, full loth were I him to kill!

Isaac:

Ah, mercy, father, why tarry you so?

Abraham:

Jesu! On me have pity,
That I have most in mind.

Isaac:

Now, father, I see that I shall die:
Almighty God in majesty!
My soul I offer unto Thee!

Abraham:

To do this deed I am sorrye.

Here let Abraham make a sign as tho' he would cut off his son Isaac's head with his sword; then...

God speaks:

Abraham, my servant dear,
Lay not thy sword in no manner
On Isaac, thy dear darling.
For thou darest me, well wot I,
That of thy son has no mercy,
To fulfil my bidding.

Abraham:

Ah, Lord of heaven and King of bliss,
Thy bidding shall be done, i-wiss!
A horned wether here I see,
Among the briars tied is he,
To Thee offered shall he be
Anon right in this place.

Then let Abraham take the lamb and kill him.

Sacrifice here sent me is,
And all, Lord, through Thy grace.

envoi:

Such obedience grant us, O Lord!
Ever to Thy most holy word.
That in the same we may accord
At this Abraham was bayn;
And then altogether shall we
That worthy King in heaven see,
And dwell with Him in great glorye
For ever and ever. Amen.



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