



PRESS RELEASE

Highlights of Worcester Three Choirs Festival 22- 29 July 2017

The Three Choirs Festival has revealed highlights of its artistic programme for 2017. Taking place in Worcester 22-29 July, the festival will include music that reflects the historical tension a century ago between war-torn Europe and the contrasting atmosphere in the United States, where spirits ran high and the arts flourished, even as America entered the war.

Artistic director Dr Peter Nardone has placed Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* at the outset of festival week, in the first evening cathedral concert by the Three Choirs Festival Chorus and Philharmonia Orchestra on Saturday 22 July. 'With its profoundly moving spirituals, acting like the chorales in a Bach Passion, and its strong underlying message of pacifism and reconciliation, the piece resonates with these echoes of the past, and sets the tone of our 2017 festival,' he says. Tippett's great oratorio is followed by late night events marking the release in 1917 of the first commercial recording of the Dixieland Jazz Band and the popularity of the vibrant ragtime of Scott Joplin, who died that year.

Shostakovich's twelfth symphony 'The Year 1917', written in response to the cataclysmic Bolshevik uprising in Russia and dedicated to the memory of Lenin, is paired with Mozart's 'Great' C minor Mass on Friday 28 July.

The theme of the 'Child of Our Time' is carried through in the Three Choirs Festival Youth Choir's performance on Thursday 27 July of Jonathan Dove's *There Was a Child*, which traces a young life cut short at the age of 19, and is taken into the final concert by the *Hymnus Paradisi* by Herbert Howells, written in memory of his son Michael.

Choral repertoire for the evening concerts also includes Mendelssohn's *St Paul* (24 July), Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* (25 July, conducted by Martyn Brabbins, recently announced as music director of English National Opera), Janáček's Glagolitic Mass, and the *Serenade to Music* by Vaughan Williams. The Three Cathedral Choirs of Worcester, Hereford and Gloucester combine on the afternoon of Tuesday 25 July to perform Odes to St Cecilia by Handel and Purcell. The Choir of King's College, Cambridge, conducted by former Worcester Cathedral chorister Stephen Cleobury, will give a recital on the last afternoon of the festival.

This year's festival will see the orchestral premiere on 26 July of *A Welsh Night* by Torsten Rasch, a setting of verses by the Welsh poet Alun Lewis, who died in 1944 while serving with the Royal Engineers in Burma. The original version for mezzo-soprano and piano was a 2015 Three Choirs Festival commission, performed in Hereford to great acclaim by Sarah Connolly and Joseph Middleton. Connolly will return on 26 July to premiere the new version, with the Philharmonia conducted by Frank Beermann, who conducted the German performance of Rasch's oratorio *A Foreign Field*, premiered at Worcester Three Choirs Festival 2014.

The Philharmonia continues its residency at the festival established in 2012, and showcases Worcester Cathedral's Kenneth Tickell quire organ, installed in 2007, in its concert on Monday 24 July. Wayne Marshall will be the soloist in Poulenc's *Organ Concerto* and the 'Organ' *Symphony No 3* by Saint-Saëns. The concert also features the tone poem *Aurora* by William Lloyd Webber.

As ever, daily liturgical services with music provided by the cathedral choirs in various permutations reflect the festival's spiritual roots, and are open to all free of charge.

Away from the cathedral, the festival celebrates the range of intimate, beautiful venues in and around Worcester with a programme of chamber choir, vocal and instrumental recitals, organ showcases and workshops. Counter-tenor David Hurley will give one of his first solo recitals since leaving the King's Singers after 26 years. Mezzo-soprano Kitty Whately will perform a new work by Sally Beamish with texts by Alexander McCall Smith, and vocal trio Voice with cellist Matthew Sharp premiere *Five Madrigals* by Roderick Williams, which will include a setting of 'The Cellist' by Ursula Vaughan Williams.

Opus Anglicanum return with a Vespers workshop and the Cardinal's Musick present a programme entitled 'Tudor Masterpieces'. The National Youth Choir of Great Britain's recently-established chamber group of young professional singers will perform a programme exploring the early works of much-loved composers.

Peter Nardone said: 'I am proud to present these highlights of our programme for the Worcester Three Choirs Festival 2017: an inspirational cycle of concerts and events where the traditional, core elements of a Three Choirs Festival are inspired and informed by what was happening one hundred years ago.'

Michael Clarke, Chairman of Worcester Three Choirs Festival, said: 'Breakfast conversations with featured composers and artists, pre-concert talks and performances of late-night original Dixieland jazz or Joplin ragtime will provide opportunities to explore the themes running through the festival programme and set the evening concerts in context.'

Details of the full festival programme will be published at the end of March and booking will open in April.

www.3choirs.org
www.twitter.com/3choirs
www.facebook.com/3choirsfestival

Artistic Director Peter Nardone, Festival Chairman Professor Michael Clarke and the Three Choirs Festival's Chief Executive Alexis Paterson are available for interview.

More information and a selection of high-resolution images from:

**Clare Stevens
Head of Communications
Three Choirs Festival
7c College Green
Gloucester
GL1 2LX**

**Clare.Stevens@3choirs.org
01452 768935 (office)
07968 367079 (mobile)**

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. **The Three Choirs Festival** has its origins at the end of the 17th century in visits by the lay clerks of Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester to one another's cathedrals for joint services and informal singing. More formal annual 'music meetings' can be traced back to around 1715 and have continued ever since, interrupted only by the two world wars, making this the oldest continuously running classical music festival in the world. The event rotates between the three cathedral cities on a three-year cycle. The next festival takes place in Worcester 22 – 29 July 2017 and is the 290th Three Choirs Festival.
2. The **artistic director** of each festival is the director of music of the city's cathedral, currently Peter Nardone (Worcester), Geraint Bowen (Hereford) and Adrian Partington (Gloucester). They work with a small professional team led by the chief executive of the Three Choirs Festival Association, which in turn works closely with a local city committee and freelance staff to deliver the festival each year.
3. **The Three Choirs Festival Chorus** is largely drawn from auditioned members of choral societies in Worcester, Gloucester and Hereford, with the largest contingent each year coming from the host city. Amateur choral singers have been taking part in the festival since the middle of the 19th century to augment the cathedral choirs of boy trebles and male altos, tenors and basses.
4. The **Philharmonia Orchestra** has been resident at the Three Choirs Festival for the past six years. More information about the residency:
http://www.philharmonia.co.uk/concerts/residencies/three_choirs_festival

24.11.16