

EMBARGOED UNTIL 31.3.17

PRESS RELEASE



Worcester Three Choirs Festival, 22- 29 July 2017: Full Programme Announced

The Three Choirs Festival has revealed its full programme for the 2017 festival, which takes place in and around Worcester 22-29 July. Tickets go on sale to members from 5 April and booking opens to the general public on 24 April. The eight-day festival features over seventy events, and surrounds the choral music at the heart of the festival with a wide range of chamber music, talks, excursions and family activities.

Artistic Director 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 (22 July). The work provided a starting point for two programming strands: '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.

"My starting point in programming the 2017 festival was the historical tension between war-torn Europe and the contrasting atmosphere in the United States in 1917. As America entered the First World War, spirits ran high and the arts flourished; the first commercial recording of the Dixieland 'Jass' Band was released (**Sunset Café Stompers Tribute to the Original Dixieland Jass Band**, 22 July) and the vibrant ragtime of Scott Joplin (who died that year) would have been heard up and down the country (**John Lenehan plays Joplin**, Wednesday 26 July) while the Bolshevik uprising in Russia was a cataclysmic event to which **Shostakovich** responded by dedicating his twelfth symphony '**The Year 1917**' to the memory of Lenin." (28 July)

The festival's flagship choral and orchestral programme will take place in soaring interior of Worcester Cathedral, where this year the stage will be relocated to take advantage of the building's magnificent organ, which **Wayne Marshall** will demonstrate to full effect in both a solo recital (28 July) and alongside the Philharmonia Orchestra in **Poulenc's Organ Concerto** and **Saint-Saëns' mighty 'Organ' Symphony No 3** (24 July). The festival also travels to a range of venues around the county, including Pershore Abbey, Kidderminster Town Hall, All Saint's Church, Evesham and Great Malvern Priory.

Other choral repertoire includes **Mendelssohn's *St Paul*** (24 July), **Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*** (25 July), **Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass***, and the ***Serenade to Music*** by **Vaughan Williams**. The Three Cathedral Choirs of Worcester, Hereford and Gloucester combine to perform ***Odes to St Cecilia by Handel and Purcell*** (25 July). 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.

Jonathan Dove's *There Was a Child* is performed by the Three Choirs Festival Youth Choir (27 July) and provides this year's cover image (a section of the libretto, illuminated by local artist John Rowlands Pritchard). This choice hints at the second thematic strand of this year's festival: the 'Child of Our Time' is carried through some achingly poignant tributes to lost childhood, concluding with **Howell's *Hymnus Paradisi*** on the 29 July. But the programme also celebrates the vibrant spark of youth – from young home-grown performers in the cathedral choirs, youth choir and children's chorus; to visiting youth theatre, promising recitalists hand-picked by the Philharmonia and Royal College of Organists, and the 'twenty-something' members of the **Fellowship Octet of the National Youth Choir of Great Britain** (celebrating music written by 'twenty-somethings' through the centuries).

The programme also features a range of activities and events aimed at families and young people from toddlers through to teens, and the Festival Village will be located again on College Green, hosting a café serving breakfast, lunch and dinner as well as wine bar and cask ales and ciders. Free 'Players on the Green' performances will take place twice daily, and daily sung services are free and open to all. There will also be displays from local craftspeople and an exhibition of John Rowlands Pritchard's work.

New music permeates the festival programme, with new work for services from **Thomas Hewitt Jones**, **Ian King** and **Piers Connor-Kennedy**, while the **Marsyas Trio** give the English premiere of **Hilary Tann's *In the Theatre of Air*** and an orchestrated version of **Torsten Rasch's *A Welsh Night*** is premiered by **Sarah Connolly**, who gave the original performance in 2015. **Roderick Williams'** new cycle, *Silence and Music*, for vocal trio **Voice** and cellist **Matthew Barley** sets the texts of Ursula Vaughan Williams, while a commission from **Sally Beamish** for mezzo-soprano **Kitty Whately** sets a new text written for the occasion from bestselling author **Alexander McCall Smith**.

Tickets go on sale in April, and the festival is launching a new scheme 'Festival Firsts' to provide free tickets for local people who have never attended the festival before, by inviting loyal audience member to donate a ticket for a new attender. Local children and young adults can also participate in the festival by joining the Youth Choir or Sing Up, Sing Out! Project (more information at www.3choirs.com/take-part).

Ticket Office: 01452 768928 10am-4pm, Monday to Friday

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

KEY DATES

Programme Online: Friday 31 March 2017
Member Booking: from Wednesday 5 April 2017
Public Booking: Monday 24 April 2017
Three Choirs Festival: Saturday 22 – Saturday 29 July 2017

High-resolution images available from:

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Available for interview:

- Peter Nardone, Artistic Director
- Professor Michael Clarke, Worcester Three Choirs Festival Chairman
- Alexis Paterson, Chief Executive

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 Three Choirs Festival Youth Choir** (14-25) and the **Sing Up, Sing Out!** project (9-13) are open for applications until late May. More information and registration forms can be found at www.3choirs.org/take-part
5. 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