



PRESS RELEASE

GEORGE ARTHUR WINS THREE CHOIRS FESTIVAL 300TH ANNIVERSARY CHORAL COMPOSITION COMPETITION

George Arthur from South London has won the inaugural Hereford Three Choirs Festival Choral Composition Competition run in association with Hereford Cathedral Voluntary Choir and Novello Publishers, with *Prayer of Thomas Ken*, an a cappella setting for double choir of 'Glory to thee, my God, this night'.

Composers aged 30 and under were invited to submit a short setting of a sacred text, suitable for performance as an introit to a service of Choral Evensong. Five pieces shortlisted from 82 entries were rehearsed and performed by Hereford Cathedral Voluntary Choir (HCVC), conducted by Peter Dyke, Assistant Director of Music of Hereford Cathedral, at a workshop in Hereford on Saturday 25 April.

The competition forms part of the 2015 Three Choirs Festival programme, marking the 300th anniversary of the event, and is supported by the Friends of Hereford Three Choirs Festival. *Prayer of Thomas Ken* will be performed by the choir at Choral Evensong during the 2015 Hereford Three Choirs Festival, and will be published by Novello.

The competition judges were Professor Paul Mealor of Aberdeen University; Kate Johnson, Creative Manager and Jonathan Wikeley, Choral Editor of Music Sales Ltd, representing Novello; and Peter Dyke. The shortlisted composers – George Arthur, Isabel Irvine, Timothy Parsons, Jacob Partington, and Samuel Wilson – as well as Paul Mealor and Jonathan Wikeley were invited to attend the workshop at which HCVC sight-read the five entries, rehearsed them with Peter Dyke for 15 minutes each and then performed them. Choir members' opinions about the pieces, expressed over tea, were taken into account as part of the judging process.

'I was delighted by the five pieces we shortlisted,' said Peter Dyke. 'Each composer responded very thoughtfully to the task of writing an Evensong introit that would be rehearsed in just fifteen minutes. All the music had much to commend it, but George Arthur's *Prayer of Thomas Ken* created an beautiful meditative atmosphere with relatively simple means, despite going into eight parts for a few bars, and its poised harmony and hushed ending will form a perfect start to the Three Choirs Festival Evensong on Sunday 26 July.'

Commenting on the competition experience, George Arthur said: 'The brief to write an introit was such an appealing one: the opportunity to capture the excitement of Evensong in a piece that should feel almost like a single breath, starting softly, building in the middle and disappearing as quickly and unobtrusively as possible. It is a big responsibility; if the introit is wrong it can mislead us as to everything that follows – when it is right we should feel ready in heart and mind for the liturgy that follows.'

/Contd.

**The world's
finest choral music**

Three Choirs Festival
39 Breinton Road
Hereford HR4 0JU
01432 273457

www.3choirs.org

Please consider helping to safeguard the future of the Three Choirs Festival by remembering us in your Will. For further information please contact the Development Manager.

Chairman: Clare Wichbold
Operations Director: Stewart Taylor
Registered Charity No.: 204609
Company Registration No.: 580176

Continued from page 1/

‘The choir were a joyous surprise! They were a cohesive, sensitive and accurate group who knew instinctively what Peter Dyke wanted. They very quickly got to grips with my piece - only one corner required some detailed work. That meant that the majority of the rehearsal could then be dedicated to shaping and understanding the piece. It was wonderful to hear Peter’s comments to the choir as to how my piece “should go”. It was clear that he had got to the core of what I had intended straight away and understood my intentions.

‘I was profoundly impressed by the work of the other composers. There was a maturity and confidence in the voice of all of the composer’s works which suggests to me that church music in this country has an exciting and dynamic future. The initiative by Peter Dyke and the Three Choirs Festival must be applauded - so too the work of the choir and all involved. This was something very special and an opportunity for all of us to hear not only our pieces, but capture a glimpse inside the ‘rehearsal room’ - what goes on prior to a service.’

Paul Mealor said: ‘We heard an amazing amount of top quality sacred choral music at the Three Choirs Composition Competition. Each of the finalists really brought something different and fresh to the genre. George Arthur’s winning piece seemed to bring all of the elements needed for a successful introit into one, two-minute piece – memorable and full of character, challenging without being undo-able and questioning whilst also offering a moment’s reflection. I’m sure this will become a much performed and enjoyed introit.’

Jonathan Wikeley said: ‘Writing a short musical work is no easy task. This competition was a fine example of how short pieces which are easily learnable can still take the listener on an exciting and complete musical journey. All five composers followed their detailed brief successfully with delightful and incredibly varied results; offering a collection of works that will hopefully be performed and enjoyed by choirs and audiences many times over. George Arthur’s *Prayer of Thomas Ken* was a gem of an introit – a simple, yet memorable idea, elegantly treated – with beautiful harmonies and a well-crafted structure, that will no doubt delight choirs for years to come.’

‘Hereford Cathedral Voluntary Choir performed magnificently,’ added Peter Dyke, ‘never losing concentration for a moment during the three-hour workshop and positively revelling in the challenge of sight-reading five totally unknown pieces of music. I do hope we can repeat the process in the future to give more composers the chance to hear their music live!’

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. **George Arthur** studied at Durham University, where he held the position of Director of Music at St John's College for a period of six years. He has written music for choir and organ, as well as music for chamber ensemble, several song cycles and solo instrumental works. George was born in Bromley, South London and grew up in North Kent. His musical influences are hugely varied, and he draws upon this rich diversity when scoring for different forces. Although he has never received any formal musical training, George has enjoyed a celebrated early career in music, holding top choral posts around the UK. He is consultant to the Anglican Cathedral Ministry in India and is in demand as a choral conductor, organist and pianist.

/Contd.

Continued from page 2/

Recent composing successes have included the commissioning of two pieces for the World War I commemoration service from Glasgow Cathedral, broadcast on television around the world, and sung in the presence of HRH The Prince of Wales and the Prime Minister. In 2015 a recording of George Arthur's Christmas music is due for general release.

George holds a fellowship of St John's College in Durham, and currently lives in South London with his (long-suffering!) partner, Charlotte. Together, they enjoy food and wine, travelling and spending time in the open-air.

2. The **Three Choirs Festival** has taken place annually in rotation between the host cities of Hereford, Gloucester and Worcester since 1715, interrupted only by the two 20th-century world wars. The Three Cathedral Choirs and the Three Choirs Festival Chorus made up of adult amateur singers from the three cities are accompanied in the main evening cathedral concerts by resident orchestra the Philharmonia. The Three Choirs Festival Youth Choir has also performed every year since its inception in 2010. The Artistic Directors of the Three Choirs Festival are Geraint Bowen (Hereford), Adrian Partington (Gloucester) and Peter Nardone (Worcester). The Three Choirs Plus programme of community engagement events runs throughout the week alongside the main festival programme.

3. The **300th anniversary Three Choirs Festival** takes place in Hereford 25 July – 1 August 2015. Guest artists and ensembles include singers Sarah Connolly and Roderick Williams, pianists Steven Osborne and Gwilym Simcock, conductors Paul Daniel, Sir Andrew Davis and Jac van Steen, vocal trio Juice, Voces8, the Orlando Consort, the Wihan Quartet and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. Full details of the programme can be found on the festival's website www.3choirs.org.

4. **Hereford Cathedral Voluntary Choir** was formed in 2000, primarily to sing services at the cathedral on some occasions during the year when the cathedral choir is not available. It is directed by Peter Dyke. The choir aims to complement, rather than duplicate the cathedral choir's repertoire and has given world premiere performances of several works by living composers as well as singing some of the great choral works from the wealth of church music written in earlier centuries. It has sung at weddings, given concerts around Herefordshire and recorded for local radio, and regularly tours to the city of Nürnberg in Germany, with which the Diocese of Hereford has long-standing links.

For more information and a selection of high-resolution images please contact:

Clare Stevens
Marketing and Media Manager
Three Choirs Festival
7c College Green
Gloucester GL1 2LX
T 01452 768935
M 07968 367079
clare..stevens@3choirs.org