

A Welcome from the Artistic Director: David Wordsworth

Welcome to 'John Ireland in Chelsea'; a Festival to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the death of John Ireland.

When Bruce Philips, (Director of the John Ireland Trust), and I first discussed this anniversary year I remember him telling me that various Ireland-related events were scheduled to take place throughout the year. This started me thinking how interesting it would be to hear more of this remarkable but still neglected music, programmed together and in venues particularly close to Ireland's heart, alongside works of his pupils and teacher.

Although sung and played in churches the world over, the music of Charles Villiers Stanford is still little-known and sadly dismissed, by those who haven't really heard it, as 'watered down Brahms', so it has been wonderful to be able to programme some of his solo/part-songs, as well as what is, by any standards, a major chamber work; the 2nd Piano Quartet, played by the London Soloists Ensemble, who are making their London debut as an ensemble.

Ireland's reputation as a teacher has had something of a bad press in recent years, thanks in no small way to the publication of Benjamin Britten's 'tell all' diaries and letters. These documents serve rather to demonstrate that the young Britten had a pretty poor opinion of anyone apart from himself, although there cannot be any doubt that his teacher was a little jealous of his young contemporary's enormous talent. Relations between Ireland and Britten became warmer in later years, but with 2013 on the horizon it was never my intention to feature too much of Britten's music, but it is good to be able to hear a piece written whilst he was studying with Ireland; the 'Three Divertimenti', and a rare performance of his Russian Funeral Music.

Ireland's other pupils are a diverse bunch indeed - Richard Arnell who died very recently and was thankfully able to witness a resurgence of interest in his music, at least as far as CD representation is concerned. Alan Bush, an imposing figure whom I recall with great personal affection and who perhaps had the closest relationship with his teacher; Geoffrey Bush, whose vocal music in particular deserves renewed attention; E. J. Moeran, again heard a little more frequently these days, and Helen Perkin, original dedicatee of Ireland's Piano Concerto and the subject of one of Ireland's most intense personal relationships. The only exceptions to this teacher-pupil rule is a 'group effort' by Ireland and some of his contemporaries: 'Variations on Cadet Rousselle' and a piece by the young composer Alexander L' Estrange, inspired by Ireland's most famous hymn tune 'My Song is Love Unknown'

As far as Ireland is concerned, we range from his earliest works (Sextet for Clarinet, Horn and String Quartet), the well-known (Greater Love Hath No Man, written during his time as organist and choirmaster at St Luke's, Chelsea), the rarely heard monodrama for speaking voice and piano 'Annabel Lee', to some of the last notes he

committed to paper (Elegiac Meditation and the poignant setting of Psalm 23 for solo baritone).

In amongst all this is music for Ireland's own instrument, the piano, surely some of the most significant written for the instrument by any British composer, for the church - how fortunate we are to have the participation of the choirs from both of the West London churches where Ireland worked, for chamber groups, choir, solo voice, string orchestra, piano duet, (taking the place of a missed and impractical concert by a symphony orchestra), and of course brass band; a medium for which Ireland had a rare and natural understanding.

Performing this music are some of Ireland's finest modern day interpreters: pianists John Lenehan and Mark Bebbington, the baritone Roderick Williams, and of course the Cellist Julian Lloyd Webber, to whom I am grateful for agreeing to be Patron of the Festival. Just as important are the next generation of Ireland champions, who include the pianists William Vann and Maria Marchant and the Berkeley Ensemble. To them and all performers, amateur and professional, I would like to thank them for all their work and commitment.

Finally, a word of thanks, to the clergy and staff of our two venues, Holy Trinity (Sloane Square) and in particular, St Luke's, who have enthusiastically supported this Festival celebrating their distinguished former organist and choirmaster.

Dr. Ireland was famously sometimes hard to please - on the one hand regretting his music was ignored and on the other complaining of over-exposure! Hopefully, he might approve of just some of our efforts, but either way I do hope you enjoy the Festival and the chance to hear this wonderful music.

David Wordsworth
Artistic Director