

SCHOLA

Cantorum of Oxford

Patrons: John Mark Ainsley, Lord Armstrong, Dame Liz Forgan
Laszlo Heltay, Dame Emma Kirkby, Andrew Parrott, Roderick Williams

Conductor: James Burton

Mexico 2004

Introduction

In September 2004, Schola performed six concerts in Mexico. Our aim was to bring music from the English choral tradition to an audience who had perhaps not experienced live choral music. We also sought to perform music by contemporary British composers, such as Francis Grier, Kenneth Leighton and James MacMillan, some of whose pieces we premiered in Mexico. At the same time, we charted the development of sacred music in our programme 'Cinco siglos de música sacra'. From John Taverner's 'Dum transisset Sabbatum' through Allegri's 'Miserere', Bach's 'Komm, Jesu, Komm' and music by Brahms and Rachmaninov to Francis Grier in the twentieth century. Grier was organist of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, almost exactly five hundred years after John Taverner had occupied the same post.



- 1 The smoking volcano Popocatepetl outside Mexico City

The Anglo-Mexican Foundation organised our invitations to perform in the Sala Nezahualcoyotl and the festivals. They also dealt with logistical questions of accommodation and internal transport and publicity. They arranged the tour so that all our costs in Mexico were paid for in donations from concert organisers. The choir received substantial sponsorship from HSBC Mexico, in return for which we put their logo on our programmes, and gave them options over tickets to our concerts. Members of the choir raised the balance of the tour costs through very successful appeals to UK trusts, companies and colleges, as well as by busking in Oxford city centre.



- 2 Aztec ruins in the centre of Mexico City

Although the choir valued the opportunity to explore a foreign land, we all felt that the primary purpose behind our tour was to communicate our love of choral music to our audiences, and the wider audiences who heard us on the television or radio, or who read about us in the

newspapers. The choir sang music from five centuries in six tongues, but transcended the language barrier by communicating with our audience in the universal language of music.

The Publicity Machine

On Monday 6th September, tour co-ordinator Ian Higgins (a final-year law student at University College) and conductor James Burton flew to Mexico City. There was considerable demand for interviews from the Mexican media. James and Ian gave interviews resulting in full or half-page articles about the choir in Milenio, La Jornada and Diario, all national daily newspapers. XEB, MVS and Opus 94 (the only purely classical radio station in Mexico)

devoted whole programmes to interviews with representatives of the choir, in which tracks from the choir's CDs were played on air, and listeners phoned in with questions. Two national TV stations filmed the choir's rehearsal, and broadcast our singing with an interview about our forthcoming concerts on the evening news.



- 3 James Burton being interviewed by Mexican TV Canal 22

Arrival and Rehearsals

After only a two-day wait which seemed much longer, the choir was reunited at Mexico City airport to greetings of "¡Hola Schola!", though any celebratory



- 4 Mexico City's main square on Independence Day (September 16th)

atmosphere which might have existed was slightly dampened by the sheer exhaustion of travelling from 8am (BST) until 9pm Mexican time (3am BST). A splendid dinner (complete with patriotically coloured trifle) was provided by the Anglican Hostel, and served as the introduction to two of our friends from the Anglo-Mexican Foundation, Susan Chapman and Delia Martinez. After a much-needed night's sleep, Schola reassembled at 10am for an important rehearsal: not

only did the rehearsals of the 9th September constitute our last chance to review music without the pressure of a concert the same evening, but there was also a film crew in attendance at each of the two rehearsals, in the morning from Once TV (Channel 11) and in the afternoon from Canal 22, both national television stations.

First concert, first-class

Sala Nezahualcoyotl, Mexico City - 10th September, 8.30pm

The sheer scale of the Mexico City's Sala Nezahualcoyotl, the 2,300- seater centrepiece of the important University-owned cultural complex, is not immediately apparent thanks to some impressive lighting tricks. The concert hall is known as having one of the finest acoustics in Latin America. The concert was broadcast by the University of Mexico City's television station, UNAM TV. The programme, entitled "Cinco siglos de música sacra" ("Five centuries of sacred music", printed on page 11) attracted a large and appreciative audience, the largest ever audience for a concert of this kind in the Sala Nezahualcoyotl. The long rehearsals in the days before the concert paid off; the quality of the performance resulted in rapturous applause, two encores and a standing ovation. The first encore, 'Xicochi conetzintle', was written in a combination of Nahuatl and Spanish by an early European settler, the Portuguese Gaspar Fernandez, and is well-known enough to have provoked a reaction from the crowd when it was announced. The second encore, 'Chilli con carne' by Anders Edenroth, is a recipe for what most European nations see as a Mexican dish (in fact it is Cuban). The humour and slight facetiousness of the piece ensured its popularity throughout our stay in Mexico.



- 5 Sala Nezahualcoyotl, Mexico City

Festival

Museo de Arte Virreinal Puebla - 11th September, 7pm

We were invited to Puebla by the Secretariat of Culture of the Puebla State Government to perform in the 6th International Festival of Puebla, which featured 650 artists from 11 countries. Schola was billed as "one of the best choral groups of Europe". Built on the site of the sixteenth-century St. Peter's Hospital, the Puebla Museum of Viceroyal Art consists of a small permanent collection and many temporary exhibits. The concerts during the International Festival take place in an outside quadrangle which is covered for the duration of the festival. The programme (to be found on page 12) included the Mexican premiere of the Gloria from Kenneth Leighton's Mass for Double Choir. The rest of the Mass was premiered later in the tour, but the audience present at this concert received its foretaste of the full performance well.



- 6 Rehearsing in Puebla

The concert, part of a nine-day festival starting the previous day, was broadcast live on local radio station Sicom Radio, received throughout Puebla state. A 700-strong audience warmed to Schola in a particularly successful performance, and after long applause and cries of

"¡Encore!", as well as another standing ovation, both 'Xicochi' and 'Chilli', as they have become known, were performed; had there not been another group of performers waiting to take the stage after Schola, we would undoubtedly have needed another encore before the audience allowed us to leave!

Feels like home

Christ Church, Mexico City - 12th September, 6pm

Most of Schola spend a great deal of their time in their college chapels, so coming to Christ Church felt very much like a homecoming. The choir's base for the tour was the Anglican Hostel, where the warm reception and friendliness of staff and seminarians made us feel equally at home.

As early as March, James MacMillan's 'A Child's Prayer' was floated as a possible piece for the tour. MacMillan composed the music for the memorial service of the children killed at Dunblane Primary School in Scotland. Following the tragedies in Beslan, North Ossetia, which took place immediately before our departure, its programming could not have been more appropriate. It was decided at a relatively late stage of planning that we should alter the programme and sing a Russian piece in honour of the dead and wounded. Coupled



- 7 Detail from stained glass in Christ Church, Mexico

with Rachmaninov's 'Bogoroditsye Dyevo' ('Ave Maria'), the MacMillan was followed by a short, reflective silence. Following the concert, a reception was held for the choir and a number of invited dignitaries, including the Bishop of Mexico and committee and staff from the Anglo- Mexican Foundation. This provided an excellent chance to mingle with Britons living in Mexico, as well as an important opportunity for the choir to relax and take in the atmosphere.

Going North

Templo de San Francisco, San Luis Potosí - 13th September, 8.30pm

Teatro, Matehuala S.L.P. - 14th September, 8.30pm



A long eight-hour coach journey packed with beautiful scenery began the choir's day. Thanks to San Luis Potosí state (for whose state festival the final two concerts took place), we had the opportunity to perform in a beautiful venue in a beautiful city. The publicity for the festival was excellent, with a large banner outside the Secretariat of Culture (to the left) announcing our concert providing us with a very pleasant surprise upon arrival! The programme, devised especially for the state's festival, had as its centrepiece the Mass for Double Choir by Kenneth Leighton, in its Mexican premiere. Schola's long-standing association with Kenneth Leighton made our eventual performance of the 1966 Mass almost inevitable, but to air it to a new audience was one of

the defining experiences of the tour from the singers' point of view. At the end of the concert (in between the two encores the audience demanded), the whole audience in the packed-out Templo de San Francisco got to their feet. This was shortly followed by the bouquet of flowers carried by a young girl in a beautiful white dress. Little did we know that there was a stream of girls in white dresses waiting with a hand-crafted bag full of chocolate for each member of the choir.

The final concert of our five-day marathon took place in the Teatro Manuel José Othón, an architectural gem in the provincial town of Matehuala in San Luis Potosí state. The Matehuala children's choir was present at the concert, and we very much enjoyed meeting the children.

Ambassador's Residence

On the evening of the 16th, the choir performed a short concert before dinner at the residence of Her Majesty's Ambassador to Mexico, HE Denise Holt. Amongst the guests were the Turkish, Danish and Italian ambassadors, and members of the Anglo-Mexican Foundation, as well as the chairman of HSBC Mexico. Schola enjoyed singing for their supper! A happy coincidence of timings meant that the choir had the opportunity to attend the Grito celebrations on the night of the 15th, and taking in that atmosphere was one of the most memorable moments of the tour. We felt welcome throughout our stay in Mexico, but especially on this night!

Tour report by Andrew Henderson

Programme 1

Sala Nezahualcoyotl and Christ Church

Jean Mouton (c. 1458-1522)

John Taverner (c. 1490-1545)

G.P. da Palestrina (c. 1525-1594)

Alonso Lobo (c. 1555-1617)

Gregorio Allegri (1582-1652)

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

Nesciens Mater

Dum transisset sabbatum

Exsultate Deo

Versa est in luctum

Miserere

Hear my prayer, O Lord

Komm, Jesu, komm

INTERVAL

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Anton Bruckner (1824-1896)

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Hugo Wolf (1860-1903)

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

James MacMillan (b1959)

Francis Grier (b1955)

Richte mich, Gott

Locus iste

Drei Gesänge

Resignation

Bogoroditsye Dyevo (Ave Maria)

Hodie Christus natus est

Hymn to the Virgin

A Child's Prayer

Alleluia! I bring you news of great joy

Programme 2

Museo de Arte Verreinal Puebla

G.P. da Palestrina (c. 1525-1594)	<i>Exsultate Deo</i>
Andrea Gabrieli (c. 1510-1586)	<i>O Sacrum Convivium</i>
Henry Purcell (1659-1695)	<i>Hear my prayer, O Lord</i>
J.S. Bach (1685-1750)	<i>Komm, Jesu, komm</i>
Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)	<i>Bogoroditsye Dyevo (Ave Maria)</i>
Kenneth Leighton (1929-1988)	<i>Gloria (from Mass for Double Choir)</i>

INTERVAL

Thomas Vautor (fl. 1600-1620)	<i>Sweet Suffolk Owl</i>
Gerald Finzi (1901-1956)	<i>Nightingales</i>
Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)	<i>Three Shakespeare Songs</i>
Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)	<i>Abendständchen (from Drei Gesänge)</i>
Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)	<i>Ballad of Green Broom</i> <i>(from Five Flower Songs)</i>

Programme 3

San Luis Potosí and Matehuala

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)	<i>Hear my prayer, O Lord</i>
Kenneth Leighton (1929-1988)	<i>Kyrie (from Mass for Double Choir)</i>
G.P. da Palestrina (c. 1525-1594)	<i>Exsultate Deo</i>
Kenneth Leighton	<i>Gloria</i>
Antonio Lotti (1667-1740)	<i>Crucifixus a 8</i>
Kenneth Leighton	<i>Sanctus and Benedictus</i>
Andrea Gabrieli (c. 1510-1586)	<i>O Sacrum Convivium</i>
Kenneth Leighton	<i>Agnus Dei</i>

INTERVAL

Anonymous (15 th century)	<i>Dindirín, dindirín</i>
Gerald Finzi (1901-1956)	<i>Nightingales</i>
Thomas Vautor (fl. 1600-1620)	<i>Sweet Suffolk Owl</i>
Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)	<i>Drei Gesänge</i>
Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)	<i>Three Shakespeare Songs</i>
James MacMillan (b1959)	<i>The Gallant Weaver</i>
Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)	<i>The Evening Primrose and Ballad of Green Broom (from Five Flower Songs)</i>

Programme 4

Residence of Her Majesty's Ambassador

G.P. da Palestrina (c. 1525-1594)	<i>Exultate Deo</i>
Antonio Lotti (1667-1740)	<i>Crucifixus a 8</i>
J.S. Bach (1685-1750)	<i>Komm, Jesu, komm</i>

INTERVAL

Anonymous (15 th century)	<i>Dindirín, dindirín</i>
Gerald Finzi (1901-1956)	<i>Nightingales</i>
Thomas Vautor (fl. 1600-1620)	<i>Sweet Suffolk Owl</i>
Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)	<i>Three Shakespeare Songs</i>
James MacMillan (b1959)	<i>The Gallant Weaver</i>
Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)	<i>Ballad of Green Broom</i> <i>(from Five Flower Songs)</i>