

PROGRAMME NOTE

Since 1997, when my anthem *Spring* was commissioned by the Royal Academy of Art for their Summer Exhibition Members' Service, I have been longing to complete a set of four seasons for choir. Vivaldi's most famous work of that title has inspired quite a few instrumental seasons but not so many for voice. It was another twelve years until the Waynflete Singers commissioned *A Summer Wish* and asked me to orchestrate *Spring* to go with it. So, I'm especially grateful to The Bach Choir for commissioning the missing two seasons and, at last, making the set complete.

I chose Christina Rossetti's *A Summer Wish* not just because of the obvious musical references but also its languor and bittersweet atmosphere, which so suits my bitonal harmonic language. The 'dew' in the poem is the strongest musical feature, introducing each verse in little glistening runs and chiming beads on the harp and vibraphone.

Then comes Lawrence Binyon's *Now is the Time for the Burning of the Leaves* – the woodwinds often representing swirling and falling leaves against an almost 'business-like' string accompaniment as the sweeping and bonfire building commences. This is contrasted in the more subdued and slightly sadder second and fourth verses as the emptiness of *Winter* is anticipated.

But *Blow, Blow, Thou Winter Wind* is far from empty – Shakespeare takes us into the forest, glistening with snow and ice in an excerpt from *As you like it*. Sharp and icy bitonal harmonies convey the words' playfulness with a sharp undertone. This is blended with whistling and whispering from the choir. There is a dizziness to the 'Heigh ho!' refrain and the ending sees our merry troupe calling out as they leave us behind in the woods.

The music I've used for Gerard Manley Hopkins's *Spring* is very much a metaphor for plants going from nothing to spectacular blooms. I have relished playing with his wonderful onomatopoeias and have, as with all of these seasons, word-painted to the max. I decided to end the set with this movement as a gesture of optimism and hope – whatever winters lay ahead of us, they will always be followed by spring.

I am deeply grateful to my ex-school English teacher, Tim Williams, for continuing to be a wonderful source of words and talking me through them.

Roxanna Panufnik, 7 February 2019

Duration: c. 25'

Spring and A Summer Wish was commissioned by the Waynflete Singers (the original unaccompanied version of Spring was commissioned by the Royal Academy of Art)

*Now is the Time for the Burning of the Leaves and
Blow, Blow, Thou Winter Wind was commissioned by The Bach Choir*

Four Choral Seasons

Christina Rosetti

A Summer Wish

Roxanna Panufnik
(b. 1968)

Languorously
♩=160 (3+3+3+2)

Soprano 1

Alto 1

Tenor 1

Bass 1

Soprano 2

Alto 2

Tenor 2

Bass 2

Piano

Languorously
♩=160 (3+3+3+2)
(Dew drops)

p

molto pedale

A.1

mp

Live all thy sweet life thro',

mf

7 *mp*

S.1 Sweet Rose, dew - sprent, Drop down thine eve - ning

A.1

S.2 *mp*

S.2 Sweet Rose, dew - sprent, Drop down thine eve - ning

A.2

oo

10 *mp* *mf sub.*

S.1 dew to ga-ther it a - new is bright:

A.1 *mp* *mf sub.*

A.1 When the day is bright:

T.1 *mf*

T.1 bright:

B.1 *mf*

B.1 bright:

S.2 *mp* *mf 2*

S.2 dew to ga-ther it a - new is day is bright:

A.2 *mp* *mf 2*

A.2 When the day is... day is bright:

T.2 *mf 2*

T.2 day is bright:

B.2 *mf*

B.2 bright:

f sub.