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Epsom Choral Society – Belshazzar’s Feast

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Epsom Choral Society and Barnes Choir with the Arcubus Ensemble present a celebration of English music

Belshazzar’s Feast is arguably the most exciting piece of choral music ever written. Conceived on a grand scale, it was originally scored for double choir, semi-chorus and full orchestra including piano, organ and two harps. However on seeing an early draft Sir Thomas Beecham commented ‘As you’ll never hear the thing again, my boy, why not throw in a couple of brass bands?’ Walton happily obliged and the result is a ‘cacophonous mash-up of the Lancastrian brass-band tradition, the fast pace of the parlour song, the theatrical ritual of Christ Church Cathedral Oxford, and the sheer vulgarity of English martial music of the time.

‘I was glad’ has been used at Westminster Abbey in the coronation ceremonies of British monarchs since King Charles I in 1626. This version was written for the coronation of King Edward VII in 1902.

Vaughan Williams was inspired throughout his life by Anglican liturgy and music, the soaring architecture of its cathedrals, the English of the King James Bible and mysticism of the metaphysical poets. The ‘Five mystical songs’ are settings of poems by the priest and poet George Herbert (1593–1633)

Elgar’s much loved Serenade for Strings is an early piece in three short movements, written in March 1892 and first performed privately in that year; its public premiere was in 1896.

Parry’s ‘Blest Pair of Sirens’ ichoir and orchestra is a setting John Milton’s ode ‘At a solemn Musick’. It was first performed at St James’s Hall, London in 1887, conducted by its dedicatee, Charles Villiers Stanford.

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