**The Dance, forever the Dance**

This work was commissioned by the Hertfordshire Chorus with funds provided by the Foundation for Sport and the Arts, Eastern Arts Board and the Holst Foundation. It was given its first performance in St Albans Cathedral in 1999 by the Hertfordshire Chorus, Gillian Moore (mezzo-soprano), and the Guildhall Symphony Orchestra conducted by Michael Kibblewhite. The London premiere took place in 2004 at the Royal Festival Hall with the Bach Choir, Anna Burford (mezzo-soprano), and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra conducted by David Hill.

*The Dance, forever the Dance* is a large-scale work for mezzo-soprano, chorus and orchestra, lasting some thirty minutes. It is in four movements, mirroring the structure of traditional symphonic form – in fact it could be described as a symphony for voices and orchestra. The majesty and vigour of the first movement (*Dance of Joy*) is complimented by the lyrical restraint of the second (*Dance of Love*), whilst the third (*Dance of Death*) is both sinister and sensual and parodies a Viennese waltz rather in the manner of Ravel’s *La Valse*. The final movement (*Dance of Life*) banishes the darkness of the previous movement with extrovert exuberance, winding its way via highly rhythmically-charged rhetoric and Tippett-like contrapuntal passages, to ‘bluesy’ seductiveness; but the work ends in a blaze of life-affirming colour. The mezzo-soprano soloist has a prominent role in the second and fourth movements.

The text has been compiled from a variety of sources – including Byron, Lewis Carroll, Oscar Wilde, and WH Auden - which use ‘dance’ as a metaphor for life in its various guises. In particular, the first movement uses words by Byron: *On with the dance, let joy be unconfined*, and Lewis Carroll: *Will you, won’t you, join in the dance*, whilst the second uses the well-known text of a medieval mystery play: *Tomorrow shall be my dancing day*. The third movement uses almost the entire text from a poem written in 1883 in Paris by Oscar Wilde – *The Harlot’s House*, whilst the final movement includes a four-line quotation from a WH Auden poem.

The work is scored for large symphony orchestra, including harp, piano and celeste, and antiphonal off-stage trumpets.

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