**Three John Donne Settings**

This work was commissioned by the Friends of the National Youth Choir of Wales and is dedicated to Keith Griffin, Director of Music Centre Wales from 1984-2011.  The première was given in July 2013 at St Mary’s Church, Conwy, as part of the Conwy Classical Music Festival, by the National Youth Choir of Wales, conducted by David Lawrence.

From an early age I have been a great admirer of the poetry of John Donne, and so it seemed fitting, considering the nature of the commission and its dedicatee, to choose texts from Donne’s Divine Poems in order to form a contrasting set of three pieces for unaccompanied choir. The individual settings are:

1. When I have spunne my last thred  
2. The Lord is good to them  
3. Paradise and Calverie

The first setting, its text taken from ‘A Hymne to God the Father’, concerns the poet’s fear (which he regards as a sin) of doubting God’s promise of mercy and forgiveness, but prays that through his Son he will find redemption (note the puns of ‘son’ and ‘sun’ and ‘done’ and ‘Donne’). The music utilises a semi-chorus singing the text (*quasi declamato*) mainly in unison against a backdrop of the main chorus’s vocalise, which utilises the musical metaphor of the spinning wheel through its persistent lilting repetitions. The music rises to a climax of contrasting major chords on the words: ‘Thy son shall shine as he shines now’, but the setting ends quietly, as if in contemplation.

The second setting, which uses two stanzas from ‘The Lamentations of Jeremy’, is a simple statement of faith and trust in God, and takes its musical form from the ‘traditional’ motet - simple in design and language, but using extensive counterpoint as a means of heightened expression.

The final setting, taken from ‘A Hymn to God, my God, in my sickness’ (one of Donne’s final poems, probably written on his deathbed) deals with the contradictions of spirituality and carnality, themes which run through both Donne’s poetry and indeed his own life. This is expressed through his use of the image of ‘both Adams’ (ie the Adam of original sin, and Christ himself), with the hope that he will find redemption and enter into heaven, wrapped in Christ’s purple robe. The music is fast but faltering, with percussion (wood block and tambourine) adding dramatic colour, as the music heads towards its ultimately triumphant goal in a blaze of affirmation and glory.

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