**Music of the Angels**

In 1998, Gregson was commissioned by conductor Martyn Brabbins to write a short concert opener with choir to mark his debut as Music Director of the Huddersfield Choral Society. Entitled *…and the seven trumpets…* this ten minute flourish is founded on a verse from Chapter 8 of the Revelation To John (The Apocalypse), the last book in the Bible: ‘and I saw the seven Angels which stood before God: and to them were given seven trumpets’. The performance employed the full power of the Huddersfield Town Hall organ and the brass section of the BBC Philharmonic, including seven trumpets and four horns placed strategically around hall.

The following year, when Gregson received a commission from the Cheshire-based Foden's Brass Band, conducted at that time by Nicholas Childs, for a work to mark its centenary in 2000, he turned to the first portion of *…and the seven trumpets...* as the basis for an ambitious celebratory work entitled *The Trumpets of the Angels*. “The opportunity to create an extended work which would break out of the brass band mould was an important milestone for me,” the composer says. In 2015 he was asked by Nicholas Childs to create a new performing edition without organ for the Black Dyke Band. This received its first performance in April 2016 at the European Brass Band Festival in Lille. In 2018, Gregson revisited the music for a third time, returning the opening fanfares to orchestral brass and transforming substantial portions of the ‘Black Dyke’ version to create Music of the Angels, a dramatic canvas for symphonic brass and percussion.

An array of bells and gongs offer an unmistakable key to the source of Gregson's inspiration. Inscribed In tribute to Olivier Messiaen, the work's principal material and its sound world, but crucially not the underlying musical processes, are influenced by Messiaen's masterpiece for wind and percussion, *Et exspecto ressurectionem mortuorum* (1964). Music of the Angels begins with braying of horns suggestive of the start of an ancient ritual. Six ‘angel’ trumpeters, set behind the ensemble, answer in sequence, with the evocative sound of tam-tams creating the Messiaen-like aura. Once the horns have reached the performing space, four of the trumpeters deliver highly contrasting fanfare cadenzas. At the climax of this episode, the individual fanfares are presented together, as if, perhaps, to reflect the Biblical writer’s apocalyptic visions of hail, fire, seas of blood and the cataclysmic destruction of man and beast.

This powerful vision of death and destruction gives way to a prayerful lament, re-imagining a sung Kyrie Eleison from the ‘Black Dyke’ edition, with flugel horn and euphonium obligati. The hushed atmosphere is broken by tenor and side drums, and trumpets five and six, which gallop away like the Horsemen of the Apocalypse. In the biblical account their steeds had ‘heads like lions with fire and smoke and sulphur issuing from their mouths’.

As the reverberation of a dramatic climax dies we hear the entry of the seventh trumpet, from ‘on high’, blazing forth with a version of the main that extends across the entire compass of the instrument - almost three octaves. Supported by a ‘holy trinity’ of gongs, an ‘epic’ final cadenza introduces new material which is further developed in a frenetic final section. This is announced by two sets of timpani, to the left and right. Braying brass (euphoniums and horns) once more adds an air of foreboding. As the music builds towards a magisterial conclusion, the Messiaen-inspired tritones of the principal motif are smoothed out into perfect 5ths and combined with the earlier material in a full-voiced chorale, over which the seventh trumpet blazes in triumph.

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