



Saint Nicolas
750

1273-2023

*A Celebration in
Words and Music*

Saturday 23 September 2023, 5.30pm

St Nicolas Church, Forest Hill

PROGRAMME

Reading

Talk

‘Saint Nicolas’ Cantata by Benjamin Britten

I. Introduction

II. The Birth of Nicolas

III. Nicolas devotes himself to God

IV. He journeys to Palestine

V. Nicolas comes to Myra and is chosen Bishop

PROGRAMME NOTE

Benjamin Britten’s ‘Saint Nicolas’ was composed for performance at the Centenary Celebrations of Lancing College, Sussex, in July 1948, with words by Britten’s friend the producer and writer Eric Crozier. Crozier’s imaginative libretto gave Britten the opportunity to depict many different aspects of the life of Nicolas, ranging from humorous presentation of the numerous legends and stories about him to a more serious depiction of the ‘man behind the saint’ which emerges through his speeches and soliloquies.

Tonight’s performance presents the first half of the cantata up to the dedication of Nicolas as Bishop of Myra. It begins with the chorus asking Nicolas to “strip off your glory . . .” and speak to them, which he does. The sopranos and altos sing of the birth and childhood of Nicolas, and at the end of each verse, the boy Nicolas sings, “God be Glorified!” until finally the adult Nicolas takes over. A solo section by Nicolas describing what led him to devote himself to God is followed by a brilliantly dramatic depiction of a storm at sea as Nicolas travels to Palestine and his ship is assailed by the raging elements. Finally, Nicolas is welcomed by the chorus as the new Bishop of Myra and we end with a rousing arrangement of the hymn ‘All people that on earth do dwell’ which everyone is invited to sing.

Julia Stutfield

SAINT NICOLAS, OP. 42
BENJAMIN BRITTEN
Words by Eric Crozier

I. Introduction

Our eyes are blinded by the holiness you bear.
The bishop's robe, the mitre, and the cross of gold
Obscure the simple man within the Saint.
Strip off your glory, Nicolas, and speak!

*Across the tremendous bridge of sixteen hundred years
I come to stand in worship with you, as I stood
Among my faithful congregation long ago.*

*All who knelt beside me then are gone.
Their name is dust, their tombs are grass and clay,
Yet still their shining seed of faith survives*

*In you! It weathers time, it springs again
In you! With you it stands like forest oak
or withers with the grasses underfoot*

*Preserve the living faith for which your fathers fought!
For Faith was won by centuries of sacrifice
And many martyrs died that you might worship God.*

Help us, Lord! to find the hidden road
That leads from love to greater Love, from faith
To greater faith. Strengthen us, O Lord!
Screw up our strength to serve Thee with simplicity.

II. The Birth of Nicolas

Nicolas was born in answer to prayer
And leaping from his mother's womb he cried-
GOD BE GLORIFIED!

Swaddling bands and crib awaited him there
But Nicolas clapped both his hands and cried
GOD BE GLORIFIED!

Innocent and joyful, naked and fair
He came in pride on earth to abide
GOD BE GLORIFIED!

Water rippled Welcome! in the bathtub by his side.
He dived in open-eyed, he swam, he cried
GOD BE GLORIFIED!

When he went to Church at Christmastide
He climbed up to the font to be baptized.
GOD BE GLORIFIED!

Pilgrims came to kneel and pray by his side.
He grew in grace! His name was sanctified.
GOD BE GLORIFIED!

Nicolas grew in innocence and pride:
His glory spread a rainbow round the countryside.
“Nicolas will be a Saint!” the neighbours cried.
GOD BE GLORIFIED!

III. Nicolas devotes himself to God

My parents died.

All too soon

I left the tranquil beauty of their home

And knew the wider world of man.

Poor man! I found him solitary, racked

By doubt: born, bred, doomed to die

In everlasting fear of everlasting death:

The foolish toy of time, the darling of decay.

Hopeless, faithless, defying God.

*Heartsick, in hope to mask
The twisted face of poverty,
I sold my lands to feed the poor.
I gave my goods to charity
But Love demanded more.*

*Heartsick, I cast away
All things that could distract my mind
From full devotion to His will.
I thrust my happiness behind
But Love desired more still.*

*Heartsick, I called on God
To purge my angry soul, to be
My only Master, friend and guide.
I begged for sweet humility.
And Love was satisfied.*

IV. He journeys to Palestine

Nicolas sailed for Palestine
Across the sunlit seas.
The South West Wind blew soft and fair,
Seagulls hovered through the air,
And spices scented the breeze.

Everyone felt that land was near,
All dangers now were past:
Except for one who knelt in prayer,
Fingers clasped and head quite bare,
Alone by the mizzenmast.

The sailors jeered at Nicolas,
Who paid them no regard,
Until the hour of sunset came
When up he stood and stopped their game
Of staking coins on cards.

Nicolas spoke and prophesied
A tempest far ahead.
The sailors scorned such words of fear
Since sky and stars shone bright and clear,
So 'Nonsense!' they all said.

Darkness was soon on top of them,
but still the South Wind blew.
The Captain went below to sleep,
and left the helmsman there to keep
His course with one of the crew.

Nicolas swore he'd punish them
For mocking at the Lord.
The wind arose, the thunder roared,
Lightning split the waves that poured
In wild cascades on board.

Waterspouts rose in majesty
Until the ship was tossed
Abaft, aback, astern, abeam,
Lit by the lightning's livid gleam
And all aboard cried 'Lost!'

Lightning hisses through the night
Blinding sight with living light!
Spare us! Save us! Saviour! Man the pumps! Axes!

Winds and tempests howl their cry
Of battle through the raging sky!
Spare us! Save us! Lifeboats! Lower away!

Waves repeat their angry roar,
Fall and spring again once more.
Let her run before the wind! Shorten sail!
Reef her! Heave her to!

Thunder rends the sky asunder
With its savage shout of wonder!
Pray to God! Kneel and pray!

Lightning, Thunder, Tempest, Ocean
Praise their God with voice and motion.

Nicolas waited patiently
Till they were on their knees
Then down he knelt in thankfulness
Begging God their ship to bless
And make the storm to cease.

*O God! we are all weak, sinful, foolish men.
We pray from fear and from necessity
at death, in sickness or private loss.
Without the prick of fear our conscience sleeps,
forgetful of thy Grace.
Help us, O God! to see more clearly.
Tame our stubborn hearts.
Teach us to ask for less and offer more
in gratitude to Thee.
Pity our simplicity,
for we are pitiable in Thy sight.*

*The winds and waves lay down to rest,
The sky was clear and calm.
The ship sailed onward without harm
And all creation sang a psalm
Of loving thankfulness*

*Beneath the stars the sailors slept
Exhausted by their fear, while I
Knelt down for love of God on high
And saw his angels in the sky
Smile down at me - and wept.*

V. Nicolas comes to Myra and is chosen Bishop

Come, stranger sent from God! Come, man of God!
Stand foremost in our Church and serve this diocese
As Bishop Nicolas, our shield, our strength, our peace!

*I Nicolas, Bishop of Myra and its diocese,
shall, with the unfailing grace of God,
defend his faithful servants, comfort the widow and fatherless,
and fulfil his will for this most blessed church.*

Place the mitre on your head to show your mastery of men!
Take the golden robe that covers you with Christ's authority!
Wear the fine dalmatic woven with the cross of faith!
Bear the crozier as a staff and comfort to your flock!
Set the ring upon your hand
in sacramental sign of wedlock with thy God!

Serve the faith and spurn his enemies!

A hymn for all to sing

All people that on earth do dwell
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.
Him serve with fear, His praise forth tell,
Come ye before Him and rejoice.

O enter then His gates with praise,
Approach with joy His courts unto;
Praise, laud and bless His name always,
For it is seemly so to do.

For why? The Lord our God is good:
His mercy is for ever sure;
His truth at all times firmly stood,
And shall from age to age endure.
Amen.



1. All peo - ple that on earth do dwell, Sing to the Lord with



cheer - ful voice! Him serve with fear, His praise forth



tell, Come ye be - fore him and re - joice.



2. O en - ter then His gates with praise, Ap - proach with joy His



courts un - to, Praise, laud and bless His name al -



ways, For it is seem - ly so to do.



3. For why? the Lord our God is good: His



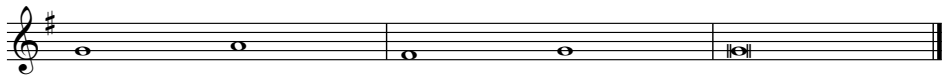
mer - cy is for e - ver sure;



His truth at all times firm - ly stood, And



shall from age to age en - dure.



A - - - - - men.

PERFORMERS

Jack Harberd (Tenor)



Photo credit Haley Hawn

Jack was raised in Norwich and Oxford, read a music degree at the University of York, and now enjoys a varied career of singing and music education. Jack holds a regular position with the choir of St Marylebone Parish Church and performs with Tenebrae, Apollo5, Corvus Consort, and Chamber Choir Ireland, among others. He records film and video game soundtracks with London Voices and is an alumnus of Genesis Sixteen, National Youth Choirs of Great Britain Fellowship, and VOCES8 Scholars. He started a two-year apprenticeship with the Monteverdi Choir in March and is now pursuing solo and operatic opportunities, taking lessons with Gary Coward.

Opera credits include *Aeneas Dido and Aeneas*, Tritone II *Marilyn Forever*, Chorus *Les Troyens*, Chorus *Così fan Tutte*. Jack has appeared at the BBC Proms, Edinburgh Festival, Wigmore Hall, Snape Maltings, Berlin Philharmonie, Opéra Royal de Versailles, and Amsterdam Muziekgebouw. Jack leads music workshops for VOCES8 Foundation, teaches on National Youth Choirs of Great Britain residential courses, and is an assistant leader with London Youth Choirs, as well as co-directing learning and engagement for Whiddon Autumn Festival.

Before focusing on singing, Jack was a specialist music researcher for music television, and worked on documentaries about Bernard Haitink, Michael Tippett (released on BBC Two in June), and the Queen, and on the BBC Proms 2021 coverage.

Alexandra Hewitt (Piano)

Alexandra Hewitt had her first lessons in music aged 5, from her 7-year-old brother, who taught her to play the recorder. She studied the piano from age 7, achieving the diploma of Licentiate of Trinity College, London whilst at college. She began playing the organ aged 17 and has been Organist and Director of Music at St Mary the Virgin, Wheatley since 2004. Although Alexandra plays several other instruments, she remains most at home at the keyboard, retaining the love of piano duets she developed alongside the aforementioned brother throughout her childhood and teenage years.

Alexandra is a mathematics teacher by profession, working for the Advanced Mathematics Support Programme, and is also a Licensed Lay Minister.

Roger Simmonds (Piano)

Roger Simmonds studied music at Bangor University and afterwards became a teacher working in Primary and Secondary Schools. In his time at Wheatley Park School he established a Madrigal Choir who toured in Europe, Canada and Japan.

He has written works for schoolchildren and adults, including seven operas, all of which have been performed. His compositions have been performed at the Oxford Play House, Worcester Cathedral and on Television. He became the director of Wheatley Park Choral Society in 1980 giving many concerts over a twenty five year period including two performances of St. Nicolas, one at the school and one in St John's Church Iffley Road. Oxford.

As a performer Roger has been a Jazz pianist in many different groups and he enjoys accompanying singers.

Peter Stutfield (Organ)

Peter began playing the piano and singing in his school choir at an early age. He took up choral singing again in 1994, when he joined Guildford Choral Society, singing and recording CDs with the Philharmonia and Royal Philharmonic Orchestras in the Royal Albert Hall, Festival Hall and Guildford Cathedral under the baton of Hilary Davan Wetton. After moving to Oxford, Peter joined the Oxford Bach Choir under Nicholas Cleobury and the chamber choir, Musica Viva, under Roger Simmonds. Peter has always continued to play the piano, occasionally in amateur recitals, but his main focus now is as a church organist, playing regularly in several churches around Oxford. Peter is on the committees of the Oxford & District Organists' association and the Oxford Music Festival and is organist and treasurer of St Nicolas Church.

St Nicolas Choir

Will Blyth, Judy Brown, Susie McIlvenna, Julie Osborne, Elina Screen, Susan Strange, Wendy Walker

St Nicolas Consort

Claire Bishop, Michael Geary, Bryan Hartley, Naomi Hinks, Iain McLean, Paul Parker, Catrin Russ, Julia Stutfield

THANK YOU

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this event:

- To all our wonderful performers
- To Anthea Beresford and the Churchwardens at St Nicolas for their unfailing support
- To everyone who has lent equipment and contributed ideas and suggestions
- To the audience, without whom all our efforts would be in vain!

We hope you enjoy the concert!

St Nicolas Church, Forest Hill with Shotover

DONATING TO ST NICOLAS

St Nicolas, like all Church of England churches, relies on a combination of donations from the regular congregation and income from fundraising events in the community. In addition to regular expenses such as heat and light, insurance, and routine maintenance, the Church of England requires every church to pay an annual levy known as the 'Parish Share', which is used to support the provision of mission and ministry. For St Nicolas this is around £12,000.

If you would like to make a donation to St Nicolas, please scan the QR Code on the right, or go to www.stnicolasforesthill.org/donate.



NEXT CONCERT AT ST NICOLAS

'Far from Home', Sunday, 12 November, 6pm
Music and readings reflecting on the impact of war
throughout the ages