

Bracknell & Wokingham Choral Societies present
a 125th Anniversary performance of

Elgar's The Dream of Gerontius



22 March 2025 6pm
Guildford Cathedral

*Elgar: 'This is the best of me.....
this, if anything of mine, is worth your memory.'*



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Concert Programme

Elgar's The Dream of Gerontius

Part 1 (approx 35 minutes)

Interval (20 minutes)

Part 2 (approx 60 minutes)

Jonathan Cooke	Tenor
Felicity Buckland	Mezzo-Soprano
Patrick Keefe	Bass
Ben Giddens	Organ
Greg Hallam	Chorus Master

The British Sinfonietta
Directed by George de Voil

Please silence mobile phones.
No photographs or recordings may be taken during the performance.
Thank you for your cooperation.

Programme Notes

Edward Elgar 1857 -1934 The Dream of Gerontius

Edward Elgar was one of the most prominent Catholic composers in Protestant-dominated Victorian and Edwardian England. His Catholic faith was central to his identity and influenced many of his works, including *The Dream of Gerontius*. However, being Catholic in a predominantly Anglican society came with challenges. Catholicism was still viewed with suspicion and prejudice in 19th-century England, and Elgar often felt like an outsider in the English musical establishment. This sense of being “other” may have fuelled the emotional intensity and spiritual depth of his music. Catholic theology, with its emphasis on mystery, ritual, and redemption, is woven into the fabric of *The Dream*. *The Dream of Gerontius* is widely regarded as one of the greatest choral works in the English repertoire. Composed in 1900 to a text adapted from Cardinal John Henry Newman’s poem of the same name, the oratorio deals with profound themes of death, judgment, and redemption, following the soul’s journey after death. Cardinal Newman was a prominent theologian, poet, and intellectual who played a pivotal role in the Oxford Movement and later converted from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism. Newman’s poem, a profound meditation on death and the afterlife, reflects his deeply personal faith and theological convictions about the soul’s journey toward God. Elgar was deeply moved by Newman’s poetic meditation on mortality and spirituality, which he set to music with a vivid sense of drama, lyricism, and emotional intensity.

Musically, Elgar’s score is both innovative and deeply emotional. Elgar draws inspiration from Wagner’s use of leitmotifs, as well as from the English choral tradition, seamlessly blending these influences into a unique and personal style. The orchestration is masterful, moving effortlessly between intimate moments and grand, sweeping climaxes.

Premiered on October 3, 1900, at the Birmingham Festival, the work initially suffered from poor execution due to insufficient rehearsal. Elgar took the disastrous first performance personally, saying ‘I have allowed my heart to open once – it is now shut against every religious feeling & every soft, gentle impulse for ever’. However, subsequent performances were more successful including, perhaps surprisingly, in Germany where the 1902 concert in Düsseldorf received great acclaim from Richard Strauss. The London premiere was in 1903 at Westminster Cathedral, which had opened just a matter of months before. Further successes, including one under the baton of Elgar himself, solidified its status as a masterpiece.

Elgar’s *The Dream of Gerontius* is divided into two parts:

Part I focuses on the death of Gerontius, a devout but humanly flawed man. The music captures his fear, faith, and final surrender as his soul departs his body.

Part II follows the journey of Gerontius's soul, guided by his Guardian Angel, through the realms of the afterlife. It culminates in a brief encounter with God's presence, marked by the orchestral and choral climax of the "Judgment" theme, before the soul is sent to Purgatory.

Part I: The Death of Gerontius

The Prelude to *The Dream of Gerontius* is an instrumental overture that sets the tone for the work's introspective and spiritual nature. Written in the key of D minor, the Prelude introduces several key thematic ideas that recur throughout the oratorio. Elgar's use of leitmotifs gives the music a cohesive structure and mirrors the soul's journey as presented in the libretto.

The Prelude opens with a subdued and plaintive theme in the strings, suggestive of Gerontius's frailty and the solemnity of approaching death. This theme, often referred to as the "Gerontius" motif, forms the emotional heart of the Prelude and is developed with great nuance. The introduction of a rising figure symbolizes the soul's striving for divine grace and anticipates the transcendent themes of the work. A key moment in the Prelude is the appearance of the "Judgment" motif, a weighty and ominous idea introduced in the brass. This motif foreshadows the soul's encounter with the Divine and is later developed more fully in Part II of the oratorio. Elgar also weaves hints of the hymn-like "Praise to the Holiest in the Height", which becomes a central choral statement later in the work. These subtle references imbue the opening with a sense of continuity and unity. These are some of Elgar's most fertile melodic ideas, dovetailed here so that one flows seamlessly into the next. When the theme arrives that will accompany Gerontius's anguished prayer in Part I, the music builds to an urgent climax with organ accompaniment and pounding timpani.

A march-like theme brings us to a brief reprise of some of the several earlier subjects, leading directly into Gerontius's first words, 'Jesu, Maria - I am near to death'. Now the friends at Gerontius's bedside pray for him with a 'Kyrie eleison' ('Lord have mercy') that begins in the semi-chorus without accompaniment. Other voices join with him, praying for his deliverance. The harmonies shift between tenderness and gravity, reflecting the emotional weight of the moment. Elgar's music poignantly captures the duality of Gerontius's fear of the unknown and his faith in salvation. Throughout Part I, the chorus plays the role of Gerontius's friends and attendants, singing prayers for his soul. One of the most moving sections is the simple but beautiful hymn, "Be merciful, be gracious; spare him, Lord".

Another most striking moment of Part I is the extended solo for Gerontius "Sanctus fortis, sanctus Deus" The aria is a desperate yet fervent cry of faith, where Gerontius seeks God's mercy and guidance. Elgar's writing here alternates between dramatic intensity and moments of fragile introspection. The orchestra mirrors Gerontius's emotional turmoil, using chromatic lines to reflect his doubts and soaring melodies to embody his hope. The words "Rescue me, Lord, in this my extremity!" are particularly poignant, delivered with anguished lyricism.

The Priest (baritone) plays a pivotal role in the conclusion of Part I, administering the final prayers for Gerontius's departing soul. His aria, "Proficiscere, anima Christiana" (Go forth, Christian soul), is solemn and dignified, using plainchant-like melodies that anchor the music in liturgical tradition.

The final moments of Part I depict Gerontius's death with extraordinary sensitivity. The orchestra paints a picture of transition, using shimmering strings and soft woodwinds to suggest the soul's release from the body. The music dissolves into silence, leaving a profound emotional impact.

Part II: The Journey of the Soul

Part II begins immediately after Gerontius's death, marking the transition from the mortal world to the spiritual realm. Here, Elgar shifts to a more ethereal sound palette, capturing the mystery and otherworldliness of the afterlife. Gerontius's soul awakens in a state of wonder. The tenor solo, "I went to sleep; and now I am refreshed", is quiet and contemplative, accompanied by sustained strings and harp arpeggios. The music captures Gerontius's awe as he begins to comprehend his new existence.

The Guardian Angel (mezzo-soprano) appears as Gerontius's guide through the afterlife. In his poem, Newman conceived the Angel as male; Elgar gives the part to a female singer, but retains the references to the angel as male. Her first solo, "My work is done, my task is o'er", is one of the most tender moments in the work, marked by a gentle yet radiant melody. Elgar's orchestration underscores her protective and compassionate nature.

As the Soul journeys towards judgment, it encounters various spiritual beings. The Demons' Chorus: A dark and grotesque interlude where the demons mock Gerontius and rage against God's mercy. Elgar uses dissonance, angular melodies, and harsh brass to create an unsettling and malevolent atmosphere. Gerontius cannot see the demons and asks if he will soon see his God. In a barely accompanied recitative that recalls the very opening of the work, the Angel warns him that the experience will be almost unbearable, and in veiled terms describes the stigmata of St Francis. Angels can be heard, offering praises over and over again. The intensity gradually grows, and eventually the full chorus gives voice to a setting of the section that begins with "Praise to the Holiest in the Height". The Soul then encounters The Angel of the Agony (the angel who comforted Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane) who pleads with Jesus to spare the souls of the faithful (sung here by the Bass soloist, as is common).

The Soul now goes before God and in a huge orchestral outburst, is judged in an instant. In an anguished aria, the Soul then pleads to be taken away. A chorus of souls sings the first lines of Psalm 90 ("Lord, thou hast been our refuge") and, at last, Gerontius joins them in Purgatory. The final section combines the Angel, chorus, and semichorus in a prolonged song of farewell. The Angel's aria, "Softly and gently, dearly ransomed soul", is one of the most beloved passages in Elgar's output. The Angel and the chorus sing "Lord, Thou hast been our refuge" and as the work ends we hear the tune of "Praise to the Holiest" and a series of overlapping *Amens*.

THE DREAM OF GERONTIUS
PART ONE

Gerontius

Jesu, Maria - I am near to death,
And Thou art calling me; I know it now.
Not by the token of this faltering breath,
This chill at heart, this dampness on my
brow, -
(Jesu have mercy! Mary, pray for me!)
'Tis this new feeling, never felt before,
(Be with me, Lord, in my extremity!)
That I am going, that I am no more,
'Tis this strange innermost abandonment,
(Lover of souls! great God! I look to Thee)
This emptying out of each constituent
And natural force, by which I come to be.
Pray for me, O my friends; a visitant
Is knocking his dire summons at my door,
The like of whom, to scare me and to daunt,
Has never, never come to me before;
So pray for me, my friends, who have not
strength to pray.

Assistants

Kyrie eleison.
Holy Mary, pray for him.
All holy Angels, pray for him.
Choirs of the righteous, pray for him.
All Apostles, all Evangelists, pray for him.
All holy Disciples of the Lord, pray for him.
All holy Innocents, pray for him.
All holy Martyrs, all holy Confessors,
All holy Hermits, all holy Virgins,
All ye Saints of God, pray for him.

Gerontius

Rouse thee, my fainting soul, and play the
man;
And through each waning span
Of life and thought as still has to be trod,
Prepare to meet thy God.
And while the storm of that bewilderment
Is for a season spent,
And ere afresh the ruin on me fall,
Use well the interval.

Assistants

Be merciful, be gracious; spare him, Lord.
Be merciful, be gracious; Lord, deliver him
From the sins that are past;
From Thy frown and Thine ire;
From the perils of dying;
From any complying

With sin, or denying
His God, or relying
On self, at the last;
From the nethermost fire;
From all that is evil;
From power of the devil;
Thy servant deliver,
For once and for ever.
By Thy birth, and by Thy Cross,
Rescue him from endless loss;
By Thy death and burial,
Save him from a final fall;
By Thy rising from the tomb,
By Thy mounting up above,
By the Spirit's gracious love
Save him in the day of doom.

Gerontius

Sanctus fortis, Sanctus Deus,
De profundis oro te,
Miserere, Judex meus,
Parce mihi, Domine.
Firmly I believe and truly
God is Three, and God is One;
And I next acknowledge duly
Manhood taken by the Son.
And I trust and hope most fully
In that Manhood crucified;
And each thought and deed unruly
Do to death, as He has died.
Simply to His grace and wholly
Light and life and strength belong.
And I love, supremely, solely,
Him the holy, Him the strong.
Sanctus fortis, Sanctus Deus,
De profundis oro te,
Miserere, Judex meus,
Parce mihi, Domine.
And I hold in veneration,
For the love of Him alone,
Holy Church, as His creation,
And her teachings, as His own.
And I take with joy whatever
Now besets me, pain or fear,
And with a strong will I sever
All the ties which bind me here.
Adoration aye be given,
With and through the angelic host,
To the God of earth and heaven,
Father, Son and Holy Ghost.
Sanctus fortis, Sanctus Deus,
De profundis, oro te,

Miserere, Judex meus,
Mortis in discrimine.
I can no more; for now it comes again,
That sense of ruin, which is worse than pain,
That masterful negation and collapse
Of that makes me man.
. . . And, crueller still,
A fierce and restless fright begins to fill
The mansion of my soul. And worse, and
worse,
Some bodily form of ill
Floats on the wind, with many a loathsome
curse
Tainting the hallowed air, and laughs, and
flaps its hideous wings
And makes me wild with horror and dismay.
O Jesu, help! pray for me, Mary, pray!
Some Angel, Jesu! such as came to Thee
In Thine own agony . . .
Mary, pray for me. Joseph, pray for me.
Mary, pray for me.

Assistants

Rescue him, O Lord, in this his evil hour,
As of old, so many by Thy gracious power:-
Noe from the waters in a saving home;
(Amen.)
Job from all his multi-form and fell distress;
(Amen.)
Moses from the land of bondage and de-
spair; (Amen.)
David from Golia and the wrath of Saul;
(Amen.)
So, to show Thy power,
Rescue this Thy servant in his evil hour.

Gerontius

Novissima hora est; and I fain would sleep,
The pain has wearied me. . . into Thy
hands,
O Lord, into Thy hands. . .

The Priest and Assistants

Proficiscere, anima Christiana, de hoc
mundo!
Go forth upon thy journey, Christian soul!
Go from this world! Go, in the Name of
God
The Omnipotent Father, Who created thee!
Go, in the Name of Jesus Christ, our Lord,
Son of the Living God, Who bled for thee!
Go, in the Name of the Holy Spirit,
Who Hath been poured out on thee!
Go in the name

Of Angels and Archangels; in the name
Of Thrones and Dominations; in the name
Of Princedoms and of Powers; and in the
name
Of Cherubim and Seraphim, go forth!
Go, in the name of Patriarchs and Prophets;
And of Apostles and Evangelists,
Of Martyrs and Confessors, in the name
Of holy Monks and Hermits; in the name
Of holy Virgins; and all Saints of God,
Both men and women, go! Go on thy course;
And may thy place today be found in peace,
And may thy dwelling be the Holy Mount
Of Sion: - through the Same, through
Christ our Lord.

Interval 20 minutes

PART TWO

Soul of Gerontius

I went to sleep; and now I am refreshed
A strange refreshment: for I feel in me
An inexpressive lightness, and a sense
Of freedom, as I were at length myself,
And ne'er had been before. How still it is!
I hear no more the busy beat of time,
No, nor my fluttering breath, nor struggling
pulse;
Nor does one moment differ from the next.
This silence pours a solitariness
Into the very essence of my soul;
And the deep rest, so soothing and so sweet,
Hath something too of sternness and of pain.
Another marvel: someone has me fast
Within his ample palm; . . .
A uniform and gentle pressure tells me I am
not
Self moving, but borne forward on my way.
And hark! I hear a singing; yet in sooth I
cannot of that music rightly say
Whether I hear, or touch, or taste the tones.
Oh, what a heart-subduing melody!

Angel

My work is done,
My task is o'er,
And so I come,
Taking it home
For the crown is won,
Alleluia,
For evermore.

My Father gave
In charge to me
This child of earth
E'en from its birth
To serve and save.
Alleluia,
And saved is he.

This child of clay
To me was given,
To rear and train
By sorrow and pain
In the narrow way,
Alleluia,
From earth to heaven.

Soul
It is a member of that family
Of wond'rous beings, who, ere the world
were made,
Millions of ages back, have stood around
The throne of God.
I will address him. Mighty one, my Lord,
My Guardian Spirit, all hail!

Angel
All hail! My child and brother, hail! what
wouldest thou?

Soul
I would have nothing but to speak with thee
For speaking's sake. I wish to hold with
thee
Conscious communion; though I fain would
know
A maze of things, were it but meet to ask,
and not a curiousness.

Angel
You cannot now
Cherish a wish which ought not to be
wished.

Soul
Then I will speak: I ever had believed
That on the moment when the
struggling soul
Quitted its mortal case, forthwith it fell
Under the awful Presence of its God,
There to be judged and sent to its own
place.
What lets me now from going to my Lord?

Angel
Thou art not let; but with extremest speed

Art hurrying to the Just and Holy Judge.

Soul
Dear Angel, say,
Why have I now no fear of meeting Him?
Along my earthly life, the thought of death
And judgment was to me most terrible.

Angel
It is because
Then thou didst fear; that now thou dost
not fear.
Thou hast forestalled the agony, and so
For thee bitterness of death is passed.
Also, because already in thy soul
The judgement is begun.
A presage falls upon thee, as a ray
Straight from the Judge, expressive of thy
lot.
That calm and joy uprising in thy soul
Is first-fruit to thee of thy recompense,
And heaven begun.

Soul
Now that the hour is come, my fear is fled;
And at this balance of my destiny,
Now close upon me, I can forward look
With a serenest joy.
But hark! upon my sense
Comes a fierce hubbub, which would make
me fear could I be frightened.

Angel
We are now arrived
Close on the judgement-court; that sullen
howl
Is from the demons who assemble there,
Hungry and wild, to claim their property,
And gather souls for hell. Hark to their cry!

Soul
How sour and how uncouth a
dissonance!

Demons
Low born clods
Of brute earth,
They aspire
To become gods,
By a new birth,
And an extra grace,
And a score of merits,
As if aught
Could stand in place

Of the high thought,
And the glance of fire
Of the great spirits,
The powers blest;
The lords by right,
The primal owners,
Of the proud dwelling
And realm of light,
Dispossessed,
Aside thrust,
Chucked down,
By the sheer might
Of a despot's will,
Of a tyrant's frown,
Who after expelling
Their hosts, gave,
Triumphant still,
And still unjust,
Each forfeit crown
To psalm-droners,
And canting groaners,
To every slave,
And pious cheat,
And crawling knave,
Who licked the dust
Under his feet.

Angel

It is the restless panting of their being;
Like beasts of prey, who, caged within their
bars,
In a deep hideous purring have their life,
And an incessant pacing to and fro.

Demons

The mind bold
And independent,
The purpose free,
So we are told,
Must not think
To have the ascendant.
What's a saint?
One whose breath
Doth the air taint
Before his death;
A bundle of bones,
Which fools adore,
When life is o'er.
Ha! Ha!
Virtue and vice,
A knave's pretence.
'Tis all the same,
Ha! Ha!
Dread of hell-fire,

Of the venomous flame,
A coward's plea.
Give him his price,
Saint though he be,
From shrewd good sense
He'll slave for hire,
Ha! Ha!
And does but aspire
To the heaven above
With sordid aim,
And not from love.
Ha! Ha!

Soul

I see not those false spirits; shall I see
My dearest Master, when I reach His
throne?

Angel

Yes, - for one moment thou shalt see thy
Lord,
One moment; but thou knowest not, my
child,
What thou dost ask; that sight of the Most
Fair
Will gladden thee, but it will pierce thee
too.

Soul

Thou speakest darkly, Angel! and an awe
Falls on me, and a fear lest I be rash.

Angel

There was a mortal, who is now above
In the mid-glory: he, when near to die,
Was given communion with the
Crucified,
Such that the Masters very wounds were
stamped
Upon his flesh; and from the agony
Which thrilled through body and soul in
that embrace,
Learn that the flame of the Everlasting Love
Doth burn ere it transform. . .

Choir of Angelicals

Praise to the Holiest in the height,
And in the depth be praise:

Angel

Hark to those sounds!
They come of tender beings angelical,
Least and most childlike of the sons of
God.

Choir of Angelicals

Praise to the Holiest in the height,
And in the depth be praise;
In all His words most wonderful;
Most sure in all His ways!
To us His elder race He gave
To battle and to win,
Without the chastisement of pain,
Without the soil of sin.
The younger son He willed to be
A marvel in His birth:
Spirit and flesh His parents were;
His home was heaven and earth.
The eternal blessed His child, and armed,
And sent Him hence afar,
To serve as champion in the field
Of elemental war.
To be His Viceroy in the world
Of matter, and of sense;
Upon the frontier, towards the foe,
A resolute defence.

Angel

We now have passed the gate, and are
within
The House of Judgement. . .

Soul

The sound is like the rushing of the wind
The summer wind - among the lofty pines.

Choir of Angelicals

Glory to Him, Who evermore
By truth and justice reigns;
Who tears the soul from out its case,
And burns away its stains!

Angel

They sing of thy approaching agony,
Which thou so eagerly didst question of.

Soul

My soul is in my hand: I have no fear,
But hark! a grand mysterious harmony:
It floods me, like the deep and solemn
souls
Of many waters.

Angel

And now the threshold, as we traverse it,
Utters aloud its glad responsive chant.

Choir of Angelicals

Praise to the Holiest in the height,

And in the depth be praise:
In all His words most wonderful;
Most sure in all His ways!
O loving wisdom of our God!
When all was sin and shame,
A second Adam to the fight
And to the rescue came.
O Wisest love! that flesh and blood
Which did in Adam fail,
Should strive afresh against the foe,
Should strive and should prevail.
And that a higher gift than grace
Should flesh and blood refine,
God's Presence and His very Self,
And Essence all divine.
O generous love! that He who smote
In man for man the foe,
The double agony in man
For man should undergo;
And in the garden secretly,
And on the cross on high,
Should teach His brethren and inspire
To suffer and to die.
Praise to the Holiest in the height,
And in the depth be praise:
In all His words most wonderful,
Most sure in all His ways!

Angel

Thy judgement now is near, for we are
come
Into the veiled presence of our God.

Soul

I hear the voices that I left on earth.

Angel

It is the voice of friends around thy bed,
Who say the 'Subvenite' with the priest.
Hither the echoes come; before the
Throne
Stands the great Angel of the Agony,
The same who strengthened Him, what
time He knelt
Lone in the garden shade; bedewed with
blood.
That Angel best can plead with Him for all
Tormented souls, the dying and the dead.

Angel of the Agony

Jesu! by that shuddering dread which fell on
Thee;
Jesu! by that cold dismay which sickened
Thee;

Jesu! by that pang of heart which thrilled in Thee;
Jesu! by that mount of sins which crippled Thee;
Jesu! by that sense of guilt which stifled Thee;
Jesu! by that innocence which girdled Thee;
Jesu! by that sanctity which reigned in Thee;
Jesu! by that Godhead which was one with Thee;
Jesu! spare these souls which are so dear to Thee;
Souls, who in prison, calm and patient, wait for Thee;
Hasten, Lord, their hour, and bid them come to Thee,
To that glorious Home, where they shall ever gaze on Thee.

Soul

I go before my Judge. . .

Voices on Earth

Be merciful, be gracious; spare him, Lord
Be merciful, be gracious; Lord, deliver him.

Angel

Praise to His Name!
O happy, suffering soul! for it is safe,
Consumed, yet quickened, by the glance of God.

Soul

Take me away, and in the lowest deep
There let me be,
And there in hope the lone night-watches keep,
Told out for me.
There, motionless and happy in my pain
Lone, not forlorn,
There will I sing my sad perpetual strain,
Until the morn,
There will I sing, and soothe my stricken breast,
Which ne'er can cease
To throb, and pine, and languish, till possess
Of its Sole Peace.
There will I sing my absent Lord and Love: -
Take me away,
That sooner I may rise, and go above,
And see Him in the truth of everlasting day.
Take me away, and in the lowest deep
There let me be.

Souls in Purgatory

Lord, Thou hast been our refuge: in every generation;
Before the hills were born, and the world was, from age to age Thou art God.
Bring us not, Lord, very low: for Thou hast said, Come back again, O Lord! how long: and be entreated for Thy servants.

Angel

Softly and gently, dearly-ransomed soul,
In my most loving arms I now enfold thee,
And o'er the penal waters, as they roll,
I poise thee, and I lower thee, and hold thee.

And carefully I dip thee in the lake,
And thou, without a sob or a resistance,
Dost through the flood thy rapid passage take,
Sinking deep, deeper, into the dim distance.

Angels to whom the willing task is given,
Shall tend, and nurse, and lull thee, as liest;
And Masses on the earth, and prayers in heaven,

Shall aid thee at the Throne of the Most Highest.

Farewell, but not for ever! brother dear,
Be brave and patient on thy bed of sorrow;

Swiftly shall pass thy night of trial here,
And I will come and wake thee on the morrow.

Farewell! Farewell!

Souls

Lord, Thou hast been our refuge, etc.

Angelicals

Praise to the Holiest, etc.
Amen



Jonathan Cooke Tenor Gerontius

Jonathan Cooke is a versatile tenor, equally comfortable on the operatic stage, concert platform, and choral circuit.

He graduated from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS) in 2015 with a Master of Music degree. Whilst studying, Jonathan sang the roles of Ruggero in Puccini's *La Rondine* (RCS), Tamino in the Young Opera Venture's touring production of *The Magic Flute* and *Le Mari* in Poulenc's surreal one-act opera *Les Mamelles de Tiresias* (RCS).

Since moving to London, Jonathan's operatic roles have been many and varied, though recently he has been focussing on the larger lyric roles, including *Rodolfo La Boheme* (cover, Mid Wales Opera), *Don Jose Carmen* (Various companies), *Hoffmann The Tales of Hoffmann* (Kentish Opera), *Pinkerton Madame Butterfly* (Opera Up Close), *Radames Aida* (Kentish Opera), and *Cavaradossi Tosca* (Various companies).

On the concert platform, some of Jonathan's notable performances have been Britten's *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings* and *St. Nicolas*, Elgar *The Kingdom*, Verdi *Requiem*, Rossini *Petite Messe Solenne* and Handel *Messiah*. Recent engagements include work with the Royal Opera House on their production of *der Fliegende Holländer*, a very last-minute *Radames Aida*, with Kentish Opera, Spoletta 'Becoming Tosca' for Prologue Opera, *Steuermann der Fliegende Holländer* at St Endellion Summer Music Festival and *Don Basilio the Marriage of Figaro* for the Opera Project.

Over the next few months, Jonathan will sing tenor solos in Verdi *Requiem* at the Hampshire Choral Festival and Elgar *The Kingdom* in Shrewsbury Abbey. For more information, visit www.jonathancooketenor.com



Bracknell Singers:

Add sparkle to your event!

We are a group of about 15 singers from Bracknell Choral Society who meet regularly to sing a variety of unaccompanied music from madrigals to Gilbert and Sullivan.

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Felicity Buckland Mezzo-Soprano The Angel

Felicity trained at the RNCM and on ENO's Opera Works programme. Felicity's 2024/5 season appearances include Marcellina *The Marriage of Figaro* (Opera Project/Tobacco Factory), and performances of Mendelssohn *Elijah* and Verdi *Requiem*. She will also sing her third principal role at ENO as Mary Livingstone in Thea Musgrave's *Mary Queen of Scots*, having appeared in both of Phelim McDermott's celebrated productions of Philip Glass: first as Kasturbai in *Satyagraha*, then as Ankhese-nepaten in *Akh-naten*.

Felicity's past operatic highlights include: Rosina *The Barber of Seville* (Bradford Opera Festival); Amneris *Aida* (Kentish Opera); Wellgunde *The Rhinegold* (Birmingham Opera); Carmen (Baseless Fabric Theatre/Grimeborn/Kentish Opera); Lily Porgy and Bess (Theater an der Wien); Nicklausse *The Tales of Hoffmann* (Kentish Opera), *La Cenerentola* (High Time); Olga Eugene Onegin (Opera Up Close, Opera South East); Beggar Woman *Sweeney Todd*, Paquette *Candide*, and Meg Page *Falstaff* (West Green House Opera); Rossweisse *Die Walküre* (Grange Park Opera); and Maddalena *Rigoletto* (Park Opera).

Felicity is in demand on the concert platform. Her specialities include Elgar *The Dream of Gerontius*, Verdi *Requiem*, Handel *Messiah*, Mendelssohn *Elijah* and Rutter *Feel the Spirit*. She has made solo appearances for the televised BBC Proms at the Royal Albert Hall, at Royal Festival Hall, and with the BBC Concert Orchestra.



Patrick Keefe
Bass
The Priest &
The Angel of the Agony

A current Harewood Artist at English National Opera and winner of Glyndebourne's John Christie award, British-Irish baritone Patrick Alexander Keefe is becoming known for his "dark, savoury voice and megawatt stage presence" (The Spectator).

Recent roles include: Schounard, Marullo, Marchese d'Obigny, Fiorello and Rossini's Figaro (ENO), Rossini's Figaro (Waterperry Opera), Il Conte d'Almaviva and Carlotto/cover Malatesta (Glyndebourne), Robert Dedo (Penderecki's The Black Mask for Polish National Radio Symphony under Marin Alsop for medici.tv), and cover Gianni Schicchi (Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, understudy for Sir Bryn Terfel).

Patrick studied at the University of Oxford, where he obtained a BA and then a Master's with distinction in Music Theory and Composition, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and the Royal Academy of Music. He was the recipient of First Prize in the 2021 Richard Lewis/Jean Shanks Award, 2nd Prize in the 2021 Pavarotti Prize, and the Musician's Company's Prudi Hoggarth Audience Prize 2023.

The British Sinfonietta



The British Sinfonietta is one of the UK's leading independent professional orchestras.

The orchestra is involved in a variety of engagements including classical concerts, choral concerts, televised events, studio recording sessions and film screenings with live soundtracks.

In recent years the orchestra performed extensively in England, Scotland and Wales as well as visiting Western Europe. Highlights include the televised world premiere of *Adiemus Colores* by Sir Karl Jenkins at the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod, screenings of *Casablanca* at the Royal Opera House in London, *Video Games Live* in Glasgow, London and Manchester, screenings of *Home Alone* in Denmark, and the London Welsh Festival of Male Choirs at a sold out Royal Albert Hall in London.

britishsinfonietta.com



Ben Giddens Organ

Ben Giddens is Assistant Organist at The Guards' Chapel, Wellington Barracks where he accompanies the professional choir and presides over the new Chapel organ by Harrison and Harrison.

Ben previously held the post of Associate Organist at St Martin in the Fields. Whilst at St Martin's, he had the opportunity to perform with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields and the Brandenburg Sinfonia as well as performing regularly on BBC Radio 3.

Ben has held organist posts at St Bartholomew the Great and Magdalen College, Oxford. At Oxford he toured regularly with the Chapel Choir as well as featuring on recordings and regular broadcasts. Prior to this Ben held the position of Acting Assistant Organist at St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, where he performed at many Royal occasions.

Ben holds a first-class honours degree in Music from the University of East Anglia. Whilst studying for his degree, he held the organ scholarship at Norwich Cathedral before returning to St George's, Windsor.

Ben currently maintains an active schedule of freelance performing and regularly deputises at St Bride's Fleet Street and is the accompanist for Wokingham Choral Society.



Greg Hallam Chorus Master

Greg Hallam is an esteemed choral director, singer and teacher. He is Musical Director of Swansea Bach Choir, Reading Festival Chorus and Bracknell Choral Society. A graduate of the Royal Academy of Music and Royal College of Music, in 2019 Greg was awarded an ARAM (Associate of the Royal Academy of Music) for his significant contribution to the music profession.

He is particularly proud to have helped set up the London Youth Choir, directing their boys and training choirs and delivering workshops as part of their 'Aspire' scheme. Greg was Assistant Music Director of the National Youth Choirs of Great Britain for several years and founded the Ulster Youth Junior Choir.

As singing teacher at Wellington College, Dauntsey's School and Christchurch Cathedral School, Oxford, Greg teaches individual lessons to young singers aged 8-18. He delivers regular workshops for the Worcester College Chapel Choir (Oxford), provides vocal tuition to their choral scholars, and has helped produce their four most recent recordings.

He is tutor to postgraduate choral conducting students at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, guiding them in use of gesture and technique and how to lead efficient and effective rehearsals. Greg's conducting and rehearsing style is drawn from his experiences as a singer. As a baritone, Greg has sung with a number of groups including London Voices, Philharmonia Voices, Voces8 and Dieci Voices.

Greg is delighted to be collaborating with his good friend and colleague, George de Voil, and is excited to hear the combined forces of Bracknell Choral Society with Wokingham Choral Society in this magnificent building!
greghallam.co.uk

photo credit: @bentomlinphotography



Nick Austin Accompanist Bracknell Choral Society

Nick Austin is a graduate of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, where he studied under Carola Grindea and Harold Dexter.

He has been rehearsal pianist for the Bracknell Choral Society since 1981 and regularly accompanies or plays continuo in their concerts.

Nick has been Musical Director for Amchor (Amersham & Chesham Bois Choral Society) since 2018 and MD for Aylesbury Festival Choir since January 2017. He conducted the auditioned chamber choir Thames Voyces from January 2013 until July 2024, was Musical Director for the Crowthorne Musical Players from 1988 to 2016 and, from 2006 and 2018, he was conductor for Stanmore Choral Society.

In between raising 3 young children, and Waffles the singing Cavapoo, Nick actually has some spare time where he enjoys arranging and composing, particularly for amateur choral groups.



George de Voil Musical Director

George de Voil's reputation as a conductor took off in 2014 when he made the world première recording with symphony orchestra of Stanford's Mass in G, Op. 46. The disc was praised by BBC Music Magazine and Gramophone, and led to George being named a Classic FM "Young Artist to Watch". MusicWeb International praised his "stylish" direction, calling his recording of Parry's Songs of Farewell "exciting and full of conviction", while Martin Bird declared in the Elgar Society Journal, "George de Voil is something of a find...He may be young, but his innate musicianship, his feeling for line, for balance, for phrasing, for the placing of chords, is exciting...". Choir & Organ remarked, "the choir achieve a superb blend under their intelligent young conductor".

This year George marks a decade as Director of Music at St James's, Sussex Gardens, in London, with its fine professional choir. Under his leadership, the distinguished musical tradition of this church has been revitalised, with an exciting concert programme and a major rebuild by Mander Organs of the 1882 Hill instrument. For six years George was Head of Choral Music at Wellington College, where he built the reputation of the Chapel Choir, leading a number of successful foreign tours. Alongside his role as Musical Director of Godalming Choral Society, he is proud to hold the directorship of Wokingham Choral Society, where his predecessors include Edward Gardner, Paul Daniel, and Stephen Layton. Highlights for 2024-25 include directing Elgar's Dream of Gerontius in Guildford Cathedral, Britten's St Nicholas with the choir of St George's School, Windsor Castle, and Mendelssohn's Elijah in the Memorial Chapel at Charterhouse.

A prizewinning Fellow of the Royal College of Organists, with a first class degree from Oxford University, George has broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and Radio 4, and given organ concerts in Westminster Abbey and Westminster Cathedral, as well as across the UK and Europe. On New Year's Day in 2025 he broadcast on Radio 3 accompanying the Rodolfus Choir, with music by Schubert and Haydn alongside a new commission by Roderick Williams. George studies orchestral conducting with Russell Keable and is on the full-time teaching staff of King's College School, Wimbledon.

Bracknell Choral Society



Bracknell Choral Society is a long-established, friendly, non-auditioning choir of over a hundred members. Our repertoire ranges from Purcell and Bach, Handel, Mozart and Verdi to modern composers. We perform four concerts a year.

Our Autumn and Spring concerts usually feature major classical works and our Summer concert is devoted to lighter music, giving singers and audience an opportunity to experience a wide variety of musical styles. Our Christmas concert is a chance to sing traditional Christmas carols and other seasonal favourites.

We are led by our inspirational Musical Director Greg Hallam, ably assisted by our piano accompanist Nick Austin, both professional musicians who ensure that we work hard to achieve musical excellence, while having a lot of fun. We perform with professional soloists and orchestral musicians who greatly enhance both our performances and the enjoyment of our audiences.

In addition to weekly rehearsals on Wednesday evenings at Newbold Church in Bracknell, we have a wide-ranging programme of social events, as well as weekend choir development workshops, 'Come and Sing' days and foreign tours to sing in glorious places. Potential new members are always welcome to come try us out.

Wokingham Choral Society



Join WCS for fun, friendship and song!

Wokingham Choral Society is an auditioned choir renowned for the high standard of our classical choral singing and for quality performances of classical and 'lighter' music. For over 70 years, our friendly, hard-working choir has enjoyed singing and performing together. We pride ourselves on our welcoming ethos and our wish to make good music accessible and enjoyable for everyone.

We offer an exciting and varied programme of four concerts a year. Our two major concerts feature great works from the classical repertoire, as well as lesser-known pieces, performed alongside professional soloists and orchestras. We sing a family Christmas concert and a summer concert of lighter music. We enjoy musical collaborations with other choirs and musicians, and organise regular social events, 'come & sing' workshops and tours to perform at inspiring venues.

WCS wish to celebrate and thank their leadership team of professional musicians:

President: Edward Gardner OBE

Vice Presidents: Stephen Layton MBE and Aidan Oliver

Musical Director: George de Voil

Accompanist: Ben Giddens

Bracknell and Wokingham Choral Societies wish to thank the Joint Planning Committee for all their work to make our Dream collaboration a reality. Thank you too to our hard-working Ticket Managers, Delyth Edwards and Ann Iles, and Front-of-House teams including Steve Davies, Hilary Quincey, Paul Lethbridge, Colin Hickson, Jennifer and Stuart McGeoch

Bracknell Choral Society thank their Patron, Ronald Corp, for his support.

BCS members 2025

Sopranos

Estelle Allen-Johnson	Sue Cledwyn Davies	Sue Jeffery	Janet Roe
Rosemarie Arden	Susie Connolly	Sheila Kean	Janet Sargeant
Angela Bithell	Maggie Fairbrother	Rachel Kompfner	Cheryl Slater
Claire Broderick	Jane Gow	Anna Luker	Hazel Smith
Sarah Bryan	Hazel Gennery	Jill Metson	Christine Underhill
Sue Bryant	Sue Haylett	Lydia Pierce	Christine Williams
Gay Buchanan	Michelle Hurst	Ann Pollen	Pauline Williams
Judith Buttigieg	Emma Jacob	Elaine Poole	Jennifer Wright

Altos

Annette Baldock	Jane Gray	Judy McLaren	Caroline Smith
Gillian Bandy	Fiona Hardman	Susie McRobbie	Christine Smith
Chris Burfoot	Anne Harrison	Diana Mead	Alison St John Eve
Jane Byford	Pam Hickson	Lesley Philpot	Brenda Thorne
Jane Coker	Trudy Inge	Jane Potts	Linda Topping
Annie Cygler	Marissa Kelly	Fiona Prew	Anne Turpin
Josephine Darling	Mary Lander	Ceri Price	Karen Ward
Frances Dicker	Julie Lloyd	Lorraine Robinson	Charlotte Wood
Ann Dunn	Sarah Lloyd	Sheila Rogers	Dianne Woodham
Delyth Edwards	Maria Martin	Liz Seward	Marilyn Wright
Olwen Fordham	Monica Martin	Leila Skinner	

Tenors

Christine Artus	Andrew Gathercole	Elizabeth Lank	Dilys Syed
Angela Bockett-Pugh	Annette Griffiths	Peter Rushworth	Graham Taylor
Kevin Boyle	Bernie Haylett	Simon Sellick	Kim Watson
Rosalind Bull	Penny Hopkins	John Steed	Roger Woodham
David Edwards			

Basses

Neil Arden	David Grandorge	Rex Pearse	Peter Roe
Dennis Bryant	Keith Greig	Hans Plugge	Geoffrey Taylor
Gray Burfoot	Alan Jackson	David Pollen	Don Webster
Bernard Doherty	Mike King	Stephen Potts	
Steve Edwards	Frank Oldroyd	Mike Robinson	

Wokingham Choral Society thanks their Friends and Patrons for their support: Peter Allington, Brian Courtenay, Stephen Davies, Robin Eaglen, Norma Emery, Nigel Foster, Rodney Hart, Barbara Hulse, Anne Kingston, and those who prefer to remain anonymous.

WCS members 2025

Sopranos

Claire Aldridge	Marion Connah	Christina Jordan	Marilyn Payler
Sue Allan	Christine Davies	Sally-Ann Krzyzaniak	Emma Reid
Phaedra Ashford	Helen Foster	Christiana Kwan	Noeline Sanders
Lynsay Atkins	Carolyn Hammond	Katy Lethbridge	Irene Simons
Audrey Brown	Megan Harrall	Judy Mak	Penny Ward
Sue Budge	Rhoda Hart	Sue McColm	Sheila White
Fiona Butler	Claire Hiscock	Jane Mellor	Nicola Woodman
Sandie Cleaver	Ann Iles	Margot Nowell	

Altos

Elizabeth Asplen	Sharon Chappell	Joan King	Elizabeth Spriggs
Teri Austen	Astrid Cobb	Diane Lawton	Anne Stratford
Hilary Blake	Liz Davies	Judith Mills	Jo Tremlett
Angela Borland	Dinah Ford	Polly Poon	Doris Tse
Inge Burton	Jenny Eaglen	Katy Relton	Claire Ward
Vivien Canning	Holly Ferrari	Marilyn Rogers	Lorna White
Jan Carpenter	Caroline Fulton	Paula Seddon	Marilyn Wright
Wendy Chan	Anne Haycocks	Anna Sigurdardottir	

Tenors

Simon Gilbert	Gary Jordan	Alison Sears	David Ward
Robert Grindley	David Kitching	Martin Smith	
Kwok Kit Lau	Richard Payler	Richard Turner	

Basses

Peter Ambrose	Chris Dunning	Robert Knowles	Steven Robinson
Neil Arden	Jeremy Farrow	Nigel Mellor	John Wallis
Mike Bowstead	Tim Iles	Martin Nowell	Danny Walsh
Rod Bromley	Ralph Jaconello	Fred Preston	Richard Whittington

Semichorus

Sopranos

Belle Allen	Susie Connolly	Meg Harrall	Zoe Sanders
Claire Broderick	Keely Dyer	Aimee Jacquemot	Cheryl Slater
Sarah Bryan	Tegan Eldridge	Katy Lethbridge	Rhian Wood

Altos

Helena Bayley	Pam Hickson	Lottie Mitchell	
Jane Coker	Rosalind Isaacs		

Tenors

Oliver Clarke	David Crispin	David Hoare	Chris Scholtens
Richard Collett-White	Bernie Haylett	Luke Saint	Simon Sellick

Basses

Shan Chang	Tim Diamond	Greg Hallam	Gilbert Jackson
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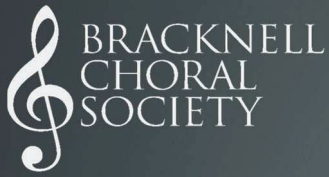


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