

Hailsham Choral Society

Petite Messe

Solennelle

by

Gioachino Rossini

Saturday 11th November 2023

7.30pm

**Church of St Saviour
Eastbourne**



For the Fallen

Douglas Guest was primarily an organist, conductor and teacher. He held many Church and Cathedral appointments before becoming Organist and Master of the Choristers at Westminster Abbey. He was a stickler for discipline, promising his choir that misbehaviour would 'result in a reign of terror to make the French Revolution look like a tea party'! As a composer, he wrote little, but when he did, it was always beautifully crafted.

Douglas Guest (1916-1996)



During WW2, Guest served in the Honourable Artillery Company and was mentioned in dispatches. He was severely wounded twice and eventually invalided out of the army. It is little surprise then, that his best-known composition is an act of remembrance for the victims of war. *For the Fallen* was written in 1971 for the annual Remembrance Day service at Westminster Abbey. The words are taken from Laurence Binyon's poem of the same name, written in 1914.

The Day That Sussex Died

Tony Biggin (1952)



Tony Biggin lives in Hailsham and is a popular and successful composer. After studying music at the University of Wales he held a number of teaching and lecturing posts, including Director of East Sussex Music Service from 2005 to 2013. *The Day That Sussex Died* is taken from *String!* a work specifically commissioned for the 2020 Hailsham Festival, and set in the town and its surrounding area. The words are by Brighton-based writer and lyricist, Stephen Plaice, a leading librettist and writer for the musical theatre.

The title of this piece originates from the Battle of the Boar's Head at Richebourg-l'Avoué in France on 30th June 1916. In less than five hours, the three Southdown battalions of the Royal Sussex Regiment lost 349 men killed and another 1000 men wounded or taken prisoner. In regimental history, it is known as *The Day Sussex Died*. Company Sergeant Major Nelson Carter was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross for conspicuous bravery during the battle.

The soloist for this piece is James Oldfield.

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)

Gioachino Rossini was born in the Italian town of Pesaro to a musical family. His father was a trumpeter (and inspector of slaughterhouses), and his mother an opera singer. He displayed musical ability from an early age and attempted his first opera when he was eight. At fifteen he went to study at Bologna's *Liceo Musicale (Music School)* where he aspired to become a composer. When he left three years later, he had already written a large quantity of music, including five tuneful and remarkably good string quartets. But his ambition was to write opera and it wasn't long before commissions came his way.



Rossini's earliest works were moderately successful at a local level, but his big breakthrough came with two operas written either side of his twenty-first birthday. The first, *Tancredi*, is a tragic opera that includes *Di tanti palpiti (Many heartbeats)* a popular 'hit' at the time and still worth hearing today. The second, *L'Italiana in Algeri*, is an opera buffa (comic opera) that is still performed occasionally and whose overture has become a popular concert item in its own right. With these two works, Rossini became one of the most celebrated opera composers in Italy, but an even greater success was yet to come.

Il Barbiere di Siviglia was written in 1816 when Rossini was only twenty-four years old. It is generally agreed that this wonderfully effervescent and enjoyable work was written in less than three weeks, although the composer claimed it only took him 13 days! Whatever the truth, it was an incredible feat, even if the overture had already been used for two earlier operas! No less a person than Beethoven admired the work and remarked:

Ah, Rossini. So you are the composer of The Barber of Seville. I congratulate you. It will be played as long as Italian operas exist. Never try to write anything else but opera buffa; any other style would do violence to your nature.

In performance terms, Beethoven was certainly correct: *Il Barbiere* remains incredibly popular. In the UK alone, the work was performed by Welsh Opera last year, by both Covent Garden and Scottish Opera this year, and is in next year's programme for English National Opera.

Rossini continued to flourish, writing between two and four operas a year. He had a natural gift for vocal melody and a seemingly effortless facility for writing music people wanted to hear: witty and lively, theatrical, beautifully orchestrated and above all, tuneful. He was not above re-cycling, as with the overture to *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, but rarely revised anything. He also made great use of 'shortcuts', such as composing arias to a formula, using lightweight accompaniments, writing simple parts for the chorus, and employing fast endings with trademark crescendos to whip-up applause.¹ Some critics thought Rossini's 'shortcuts' were merely compositional 'tricks', but one person's 'trick' is another's 'technique', and since Rossini's music has considerably more wit, life and fire than most, such criticism can be seen as heavy-handed - rather like taking a spade to a soufflé!

According to contemporary accounts, Rossini's laziness was legendary, although this is curiously at odds with his prodigious output. It seems he would leave things to the last minute, and then compose quickly and exasperatingly close to deadlines.

Nothing primes inspiration more than necessity, whether it be the presence of a copyist waiting for your work or the prodding of an impresario tearing his hair. In my time, all the impresarios in Italy were bald at thirty.

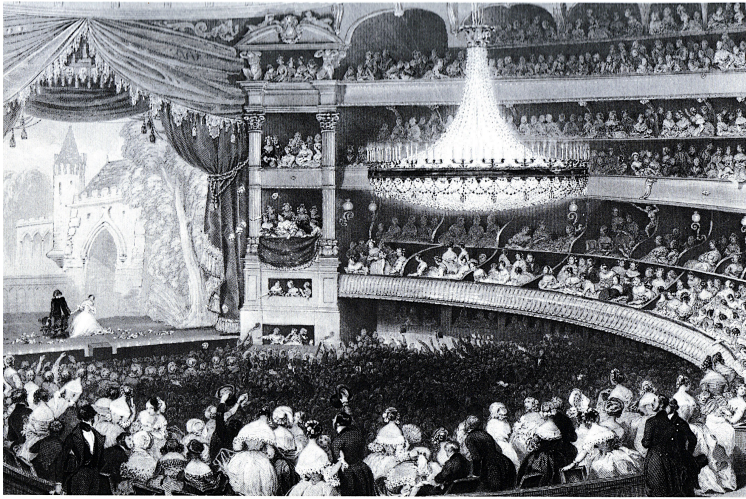
In 1822, when Rossini was thirty, he became romantically involved with Isabella Colbran (right), the leading soprano at the Royal Opera House of Naples, and wrote many roles specifically for her voice. The couple were married the same year.



By now, Rossini was internationally famous and received by the highest ranks of society. When he came to London in 1823/24, he met King George IV and they sang duets together. He stayed in England for five months and *The Spectator* remarked:

His music was universally popular; he himself was a first-rate comic singer; and his manners and address were calculated to gain favour of the [fashionable] and courtly.

¹ He was nicknamed, *Signor Crescendo*.



In 1824, at the age of 32, Rossini moved to Paris as director of the Théâtre des Italiens (left). It was here in 1828-29 that he wrote his final operatic masterpieces: the light-hearted, *Le Comte Ory*, and the serious, *Guillaume Tell*. At four hours long, the latter is rarely performed, although the overture has become one of

the most popular ever written. Some of us will remember it as the music to which the Lone Ranger and Tonto galloped after outlaws in the Wild West.

Then a surprise: at the age of 37, at the height of his fame and having written around 40 operas, Rossini retired from the world he had dominated for so long. There are many theories as to why this happened. Most obviously, he could afford to, he was an extremely wealthy man, but for such a creative personality there surely had to be more to it than that? One strong possibility is that he knew the future development of opera would be opposed to both his temperament and the traditions he exemplified. *Guillaume Tell* indicated the way forward to a new grand manner that other composers would follow, but Rossini didn't want to go there, his roots were in the previous century and Mozart was his hero. Writing *Guillaume Tell*, with its many innovations, had taken a lot out of him, and the days of putting together an opera in two or three weeks were long past! It seems Beethoven was prophetic in saying, 'any other style would do violence to your nature'.

Initially, Rossini retired to Italy, moving to Bologna to see his father and advise at his old Liceo. Then, for a few years he made a home in Florence, but he was not in good health and suffered badly from depression. When his estranged wife died in 1845, he married Olympe Pélissier (right), his mistress of 15 years. In 1855 the couple left Italy and returned to Paris for good. Rossini's health improved and he lived in fine style at his house in the city and at his villa in nearby Passy. He entertained on a lavish scale and his home became a focal point for many of the



great artistic and literary figures of the day. Only the very best food was served and he was famed for both his generosity and lavish hospitality. An invitation to his dinner table was one of the most sought-after in Paris, and his amiable nature and wit ensured his guests had an enjoyable evening.

Rossini did not stop composing completely, but the nature and quantity of his music changed. He wrote around 150 delightful piano pieces and songs which he called, *Péchés de vieillesse* (*Sins of my old age*). These were performed solely for the amusement of his guests and were never published in his lifetime. He also wrote two splendid religious choral works: the *Stabat Mater* (1831-42) and his final composition, the *Petite Messe Solennelle* (1863).

The title, *Petite Messe Solennelle* (*Small, Solemn Mass*) can hardly be serious, for as Napoleon III reputedly said: 'the work is neither small nor solemn'. It is actually a full-length mass, plus a hymn, *O Salutaris*, and an instrumental, *Preludio Religioso*.

Originally conceived and written for four soloists, small chorus, two pianos and harmonium, the *Petite Messe* was first performed on 14th March 1864 to a private audience at the town house of the dedicatee, Countess Louise Pillet-Will. The instrumentation may seem odd at first, but for a work specifically designed for performance in a house, albeit a large one, it makes a lot of sense. The *Petite Messe* was a great success and the audience welcomed the 71 year-old composer's return to form as a creative artist. Rossini was encouraged to orchestrate the work, which he did during 1866-67, and in this arrangement it received its first public performance at the Salle Ventadour in Paris in 1868, three months after the composer's death. These days, the majority of performances are with piano and harmonium.² Most authorities agree that Rossini's original concept works very well and is preferable to the orchestrated version, which adds virtually nothing of significance to the work and was probably only written because the composer feared others might do so after his death.

Rossini said he composed the *Petite Messe* so that 'the true art of vocal writing should not be finally lost'. This undoubtedly refers to the vocal style which came to be known as *bel canto* (*beautiful singing*) and is heard in music by the likes of Handel, Mozart and Rossini himself, but which had been in decline since the 1830s. As may be expected, the music of the *Petite Messe* has a strong operatic flavour and tunefulness that is typical of the composer. It also has a lot of charm and elegance, and at times an

² When the work was published by in 1869, the editor reduced the original requirement for two pianos down to one - a precedent followed in the majority of subsequent editions.

exuberance that marks it out from the sentimental efforts of some of his contemporaries. But the work also has moments of pathos and power, such as in the final *Agnus Dei* when the contralto soloist and chorus come together with the words *Dona nobis pacem* (*Grant us peace*).

There are sections of the *Petite Messe* where it appears Rossini is making a point about his musical talents and answering criticisms aimed at his previous compositional methods. He employs sophisticated musical techniques that are largely absent from his earlier work, including masterly use of advanced harmonies and complex choral writing. It is as if he is showing the musical world of 19th century Paris that his musical credentials are up there with the best. If he took 'shortcuts' in the past it was for a reason, not because he wasn't capable of doing otherwise. Were he alive today, he might have added, 'Get over it!'

Rossini described the *Petite Messe* as 'this little composition, which is, alas, the last mortal sin of my old age' and inscribed on the score:

Good God—behold completed this poor little Mass—is it indeed sacred music [la musique sacrée] that I have just written, or merely some sacrilegious music [la sacré musique]? You know well, I was born for opera buffa. A little science, a little heart, that is all. So may you be blessed, and grant me Paradise!
G. Rossini, Passy 1863.

Rossini died at the age of 76 from pneumonia at his country house in Passy. His funeral was a grand affair, with four military bands, a choir of nearly 400 and an estimated 6000 mourners. One contemporary newspaper described the scene as:

...more like a festive concert... the crowds were there to hear great singers perform and to pay tribute to a man who had lived beyond his time.

The burial was at Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, where his tomb can still be seen. In 1887, at the request of the Italian Government, his remains were moved to be with those of other great Italians at the Basilica di Santa Croce in Florence, the nearest Italian equivalent to our own Westminster Abbey.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'G. Rossini' in a cursive, flowing script. The signature is positioned at the bottom center of the page.

PROGRAMME

The concert opens with two short items to mark the eve of Remembrance Sunday, so no applause, please, after either piece.

For the Fallen

Douglas Guest (1916-1996)

The Day That Sussex Died

Tony Biggin (1952)

Petite Messe Solennelle

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)

I. *Kyrie*

Kyrie eleison.
Christe eleison.

Chorus

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.

II. *Gloria*

Gloria in excelsis Deo.
Et in terra pax
hominibus bonæ voluntatis.

Soloists and chorus

Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth, peace
to men of goodwill.

III. *Gratias agimus*

Gratias agimus tibi
Propter magnum
gloriam tuam.

Trio for alto, tenor and bass

We give thanks to You
For Your
great glory.

IV. *Domine deus*

Domine deus, Rex cœlestis,
Deus Pater omnipotens,
Domine fili unigenite
Jesu Christe.

Tenor solo

O Lord, heavenly King,
God the Father Almighty.
The only begotten Son,
Jesus Christ.

V. *Qui tollis*

Qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.
Suscipe deprecationem
nostram.

Duet for soprano and alto

You take away
the sins of the world,
have mercy on us.
Receive our prayer.

VI. *Quoniam tu solus*

Quoniam tu solus Sanctus,
tu solus Dominus,
tu solus Altissimus,
Jesu Christe.

Bass solo

For You only are holy.
You only are the Lord.
You only, Jesus Christ,
are most high.

VII. *Cum Sancto*

Cum Sancto Spiritu
in Gloria Dei Patris.
Amen.

Soloists and chorus

Together with the Holy Spirit
In the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

- INTERVAL -

VIII. *Credo*

Credo in unum Deum;
Patrem omnipotentem,
factorem cœli et terrae,
visibilium omnium
et invisibilium.

Soloists and chorus

I believe in one God,
the Father Almighty
maker of heaven and earth,
and of all things visible
and invisible.

IX. *Crucifixus*

Crucifixus etiam pro nobis
sub Pontio Pilato
passus et sepultus est.

Soprano solo

He was crucified for us,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
died and was buried.

X. *Et resurrexit*

Et resurrexit tertia die
secundum Scripturas.
Et ascendit in cœlum:
sedet ad dexteram Patris.

Soloists and chorus

And on the third day He rose again,
in accordance with the Scriptures.
And ascended into heaven: He sits
at the right hand of the Father.

XI. *Preludio Religioso*

Piano solo

XII. *Sanctus*

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus,
Dominus, Deus Sabaoth.
Pleni sunt cœli et terra
Gloria tua.

Soloists and chorus

Holy, Holy, Holy,
Lord God of hosts.
Heaven and earth are full of
Your glory.

XIII. *Salutaris*

Salutaris Hostia,
Quæ cœli pandis ostium.

Soprano solo

Saving Victim opening wide
the gate of heaven to us below.

XIV. *Agnus Dei*

Agnus Dei, qui tollis
peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.
Dona nobis pacem.

Alto solo and chorus

Lamb of God, who takes away
the sins of the world,
have mercy on us.
Grant us peace.

Soloists

Noa Lachman - Soprano

Noa started her studies in Jerusalem, singing with the Rinat choir and the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra under conductors such as Levine, Barenboim and Mehta. She also performed several world premières as a soloist, and broadcast for Israeli TV and radio. Her studies continued in the UK at King's College London, Trinity College of Music and the University of Sussex.



Since 2005, Noa has performed with her husband, pianist William Hancox, in Germany, Israel and the UK, with concerts for the London International Jewish Music Festival, Amnesty International, and the Reihe Siebzig Festival in Hanover. She has also recorded Ladino songs for BBC Radio 4's Women's Hour and performed oratorio in her local area.

As a co-founder and regular performer at Music Box Wealden, she came to see the importance of bringing music to her own community. A further eye-opener was working with the iconoclastic company, Opera Mayhem, experimenting with groundbreaking work with children.

Rebecca Hughes – Mezzo Soprano



Rebecca achieved a Degree and Postgraduate Diploma in Vocal Performance and Opera at Birmingham Conservatoire and Licentiate of Trinity College London. Whilst at the Conservatoire she won a Kathleen Ferrier Trust award and a Music Sound Fund award.

Rebecca has performed with Grange Park Opera and New Sussex Opera among other touring opera companies, playing roles such as Romeo in Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, Mad Margaret in Gilbert & Sullivan's *Ruddigore*, and Friquette in Offenbach's *Belle Lurette*. As a concert soloist, she has performed in numerous major works, including Handel's *Messiah*, Bach's *St John Passion*, Mozart's *Requiem*, Haydn's *Nelson Mass*, Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, and Rossini's *Stabat Mater & Petite Messe Solennelle*, with a number of choral societies. These include Seaford, Shrewsbury and Norwich, The Royal College of Organists, The Royal Free Singers, Derby Cathedral Choir and the Choir of St John's. Future engagements include Mercedes from Bizet's *Carmen* with South East Opera, and Siebel from Gounod's *Faust* with New Sussex Opera. Rebecca now spends most of her time singing, teaching and giving vocal workshops to choral societies in and around East Sussex.

Andrew Wicks - Tenor

Andrew Wicks began singing as a chorister at Chichester Cathedral. He attended Eastbourne College and then Durham University, where he studied music and sang in the Cathedral choir. He studied singing and performance at the Royal Northern College of Music and began his career in the Glyndebourne chorus. After taking over the role of Fernando in 1996 he sang with major UK opera companies including WNO, ENO, Scottish Opera, Grange Park and Buxton. He has been a member of the BBC Singers, The Monteverdi and Sixteen choirs and worked with leading early and contemporary music ensembles.



Andrew's concert career has taken him all over the world and in recent years he has enjoyed both singing on cruise liners, and in the extra chorus at the Royal Opera House. Recent projects include *The Golden Dragon* for Music Theatre Wales which performed in South Korea, the UK and on BBC radio. He repeated this role in Israel and Hungary in 2019.

James Oldfield - Bass-baritone



Born in Ipswich, James was a Choral Scholar at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he read Geography, then a Lay Clerk at St John's College Cambridge. He then held scholarships at the Royal College of Music and the RCM International Opera School. He has been a Gentleman of the Choir of the King's Chapel of the Savoy since 2007.

James' concert appearances include Mendelssohn's *Elijah* with the LSO, Orff's *Carmina Burana* with the RTÉ Symphony Orchestra, Rossini's *Stabat Mater* with the RTÉ Concert Orchestra, Handel's *Samson* with the Irish

Baroque Orchestra, Haydn's *Nelson Mass* with the Manchester Camerata and with the RPO, Purcell's *The Fairy-Queen* at the Wigmore Hall, Handel's *Messiah* with the Huddersfield Choral Society (recorded live), and Mozart's *Mass in C minor* in Gdańsk for Polish Radio.

His operatic engagements are similarly wide-ranging, with solo roles for Opera North, the Royal Opera House, Garsington and Gothenburg Opera.

James lives in Surrey, and divides his time between performing, adjudicating and teaching singing. Upcoming concerts include Haydn's *The Seasons* in London, Handel's *Messiah* in Worcester Cathedral, and Vaughan Williams, *A Sea Symphony* at the Snape Maltings.

Jozik Kotz

Conductor and Musical Director

Jozik was born in Oxford of Polish-Australian parents. After reading music at the University of York and singing as a lay-clerk at York Minster, he won a post-graduate scholarship to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, where he was a finalist in the Kathleen Ferrier, Royal Overseas league and Richard Tauber competitions. In 1993, he was winner of the South East Arts competition, which led to his debut at the Wigmore Hall.

Jozik subsequently performed operatic roles with English National Opera, Glyndebourne, Opera Factory, Garsington and Grange Park; and in Paris, Vienna, Zurich, Madrid, Aix-en-Provence and Lisbon.

He has appeared as a soloist at the Proms and with the BBC Symphony, London Philharmonic, Philharmonia and English Chamber orchestras. His CD recordings include baroque cantatas for Hyperion, Turnage's, *The Silver Tassie* and Gavin Bryar's, *Dr Ox's Experiment* for Deutsche Grammophon, and Paray's *Mass* with the Scottish National Orchestra, which was nominated for a Grammy award.

Jozik has been our Musical Director since 2006. In 2019 he stepped down for two years to pursue other matters, but returned in 2021 and we are delighted he is back with us.



Colin Hughes

Piano

Colin trained at Trinity College of Music, London, where he studied violin and piano. Whilst living in North London, he held positions as Choirmaster and Organist at a number of churches, as well as playing in orchestras and chamber groups, giving solo recitals and drumming for a rock band.

Since moving to Eastbourne, Colin has become well known and respected as a teacher, accompanist and performer. He lives locally and is Organist of St Mary's Church in Old Town.

Andrew Wilson

Harmonium

Andrew is a freelance organist and accompanist. Having started his career in Norway, he returned to the UK and was Director of Music at Doncaster Minster before making his home in East Sussex. He has played at many of the world's most prestigious venues, including St Sulpice in Paris and at Liverpool Cathedral.

Hailsham Choral Society

Musical Director

Jozik Kotz

Assistant Musical Director

Barbara Edwards

Concert Accompanists

Colin Hughes (Piano)

Andrew Wilson (Harmonium)

Chair

Milly Clark

Secretary

Julie Mitchell

Website

www.hailshamchoral.org



@ Hailsham Choral Society



Hailsham Choral

QR Code:



If you are interested in singing with the choir, or would like more information, please contact our membership secretary:

hcsjoin@hailshamchoral.org

Rehearsals are held during 'term time' on Thursday evenings from 7.30-9.30 in the Community Hall, Vicarage Lane, Hailsham, BN27 2AX.

We normally perform four concerts a year.

Choir

Sopranos

Jane Allen
Christine Baelz
Trish Brown
Janet Butterworth
Kim Charles
Pat Collingwood
Janet Cox
Barbara Edwards
Liz Furlong
Nancy Gillio-Terry
Hilary Hartley
Valerie Hyland
Helen Kotz
Susan Lahache
Penny Livermore
Lynn Petit
Marion Ponting
Finn Reed
Sue Simpson
Iris Warren
Maria Webzell
Sue White
Nicola Williams

Altos

Sara Cabot
Milly Clark
Pam Cornish
Fiona Dundas
Dot Evans
Liz Fitzpatrick

Altos (continued)

Barbara Fry
Jean Hill
Clare Ilsley
Fiona Koops
Julie Mitchell
Sarah Owen
Liza Stewart
Rosalind Taylor-Byrne
Ann Walker

Tenors

Nigel Baelz
Paul Carter
David Gillham
Nick Gosman
Owen McWilliams
Tom Purtill
Robert Slater
Jonathan Statter
Rob Wicks

Basses

Adam de Belder
Nick Castrogiovanni
Ian Collins
Simon Dodds
Peter Gilbert
Martin Hole
Graham Keeley
Simon Marsden
Tony Pittman



Hailsham
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Future Events with Hailsham Choral Society

Christmas Concert

Saturday 16th December 2023

7.30pm

Hailsham Parish Church

Verdi Requiem

Saturday 11th May 2024

7.30pm

St Saviour's Church, Eastbourne

This is a new venture for us, a joint concert with Eastbourne Symphony Orchestra and singers from other choirs.

Summer Concert

Saturday 6th July 2024

7.30pm

Hailsham Parish Church

Hailsham Choral Society: Registered Charity No. 1100408

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