



LUX MUNDI THE TALE OF A CHORAL COMMISSION

THE IDEA

This work was sparked in a conversation between soprano Maria Rivington and Sixten, where they discussed the musical DNA that the UK and Sweden share and how music can bring people together.

“We wanted to celebrate the musical language of Sweden and the undisputed riches of the choral tradition in England. We imagined a vocal tapestry that tells of our different cultures, our common musical heritage and the times we now live in, looking to the future together in a positive ‘Nordic Light’.”

Those involved in choral music in Sweden from the early 90’s onwards, will have come across Fredrik Sixten as a conductor, a composer, organist or musical director. His unique ability to capture that special Nordic glow in his compositions and simultaneously allowing his main influences like the Baroque masters and the French impressionists add depth to his compositions, was recognised from the start.

Sixten’s output over the past decades and his journey to global “composer-to-watch” status in recent years and his unique ability to capture the essence of a text, meant that London Nordic Choir and English Baroque Choir were ready to jump at the idea of a special commission for a British/Swedish collaborative project.

In typical Swedish collaborative spirit, an intense dialogue between Rivington, Sixten and the Musical Directors Carina Einarson of London Nordic Choir and Jeremy Jackman of English Baroque Choir, ensued. The essence of Nordic Music had to be represented in the piece and ‘Light’ was early on identified as intrinsic to everything Nordic as well as a universal symbol for hope.

Musical Directors have to consider technical ability, vocal ranges and number of singers involved to aid the work’s practical execution. The original idea of a central theme of hope and compassion and a coming together across borders also had to be maintained. How best to bring English culture into the mix was discussed in great depth and words, it was agreed, would be in English for a broad appeal. As one of the most important books in English culture, King James Bible with its vivid imagery, majestic language and resonant strength was favoured by all as a perfect source for texts on the central themes of the commission: compassion, unity and hope.

The formal commission brief from both choirs to was delivered in June 2019 and Sixten – having already had the main musical ideas clear in his mind – completed the piece in 3 months.

FREDRIK SIXTEN & HIS MUSIC

“My music is expressive and honest. It loves beauty, but is continually driven to explore its contradictions. It is not afraid of the dark or opacity. It shifts effortlessly between different moods and characters. It is not afraid of being real.”

Fredrik Sixten, Composer

In Fredrik Sixten’s music traditional structures get a forward-looking treatment in a blend of the past and contemporary. Influenced by the Bach, French impressionism, Swedish folk music, Prince(!), jazz and blues.

His skilfully executed choral works require mental and vocal agility from the performers and he is one of the most highly regarded – and performed – composers of choral music in Scandinavia, Europe and the U.S. His reputation in the UK is also growing fast and his ‘Mary’s Lullaby’ made it to the BBS Singers’ Christmas Concert programme 2019 and his UK publisher Edition Peters lists him as one of their “official high priority” contemporary composers.

Born in 1962, studies at The Royal Swedish Academy Music were followed by posts as organist and choral conductor, before composing took over as the full-time job. Much of his choral output can be used liturgically and include large-scale oratorios (one where the evangelist is sung by a soprano!) but his openness to the world around him has led to commissions like the opera about Henning Mankell’s music-loving Swedish detective Wallander in English for Tubingen Oper, Germany, a carol for American all-male choir Chanticleer and a lullaby for the Royal Swedish Family’s televised christening.

LUX MUNDI – THE COMMISSION

“In Lux Mundi, the text is central. I spent a great deal of time on the poetic quality from which different musical ideas are brought to life: a melodic thought inspired by the tone of the language, a clue from the sentence structure sparking a rhythmical fragment. Much is down to intuition and that’s when you approach the most mystical element of creation; the inexplicable”

Fredrik Sixten, Composer

The London Nordic Choir and the English Baroque Choir asked Sixten to use 'light' as a theme for the special commission. Light as a symbol for hope, for unity, for compassion – Northern lights to guide and inspire. 'Lux Mundi' (Light of the World) fulfils the brief on every level. The three movements – 'Faith', 'Hope' & 'Love' – have the sophistication and complexity you would expect with thrilling harmonies and soaring beauty. A synthesis of the traditional and the modern, appealing to both musical specialist and non-specialists alike.

A "Scandinavian" choral sound is often associated with linear minimalist style and cinematic / spiritual qualities – often with titles evoking images of arctic landscapes, and popular works by for example. Ola Gjeilo, Morten Lauridsen or Eric Whitaker. Sixten, however, retains the Nordic shimmer and meticulously crafts the precise musical expression each individual passages of text calls for.

Like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, the depths of darkness, the faith that protects us, the light that offers hope and the redemption of love all have their individual, different styles, yet join up in a central, lyrical idea – an architecture. Lux Mundi is captivating, inspiring, fresh, brave and completely unique.

"The key strength of this work is 'integrity'. Sixten has demonstrated a deep commitment to the texts of all three pieces. He has illustrated the meaning of the words by using a very wide musical vocabulary: at one end startlingly contemporary, at the other lusciously romantic".

Jeremy Jackman, Musical Director, English Baroque Choir

THE CONCERTS

"Nature's changes is a constant presence in Nordic Music and in Lux Mundi, harmonies move swiftly from winter's shadows to summer's clear and sublime light. Yearning, romantic melodies and dancing rhythms reference folk music and high tessituras add a Nordic shimmer to the sound."

Carina Einarson, Musical Director, London Nordic Choir

The full concert programme in London 16th May and Stockholm 5th July capture the original idea: celebrating our countries' finest music for choir and coming together in one unifying, collaborative piece of our time.

Venues have also been carefully selected to provide the ideal settings for the music. St John's Hyde Park in London, boasts of a fabulous acoustic – ideal for soaring voices. The Eric Ericson Hall in Stockholm – set on one of the islands has the Museum of Modern Art and The History Museum as its nextdoor neighbours.

To frame the programme's centre piece and to remind us of the musical treasures of both Swedish and British music that has informed and inspired 'Lux Mundi', English Baroque Choir will sing music by Weelkes, Blow and Purcell as well as folk songs in arrangements by Ralph Vaughan Williams. London Nordic Choir will perform Nordic choral gems by romantic composers such as Peterson-Berger and as well as contemporary classics by Arnesen, Gjeilo and Dahlgren. Both choirs also come together in MacMillan's glorious 'O Radiant Dawn' and English Baroque singers get to practise their Swedish in two delightful folksong arrangements by Åhlén and Alfvén.

Media Links

 Website www.lux-mundi.co.uk

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