

Messiah 4 Grenfell Concert

A concert in aid of survivors

Programme introduction and soloists' biographies.

Introduction.

The unimaginable awfulness of the Grenfell Tower fire shocked the nation as much as any international disaster – indeed perhaps more so for it being right here, in London.

Following the thousands raised by *Messiah 4 Haiti* and *Messiah 4 Philippines*, I decided to do *Messiah 4 Grenfell*, for three reasons. First, we can add a few financial drops to the ocean of help required by victims. Second, by coming together to do such an event, we let survivors know that they've not been forgotten in the midst of our fast moving news media. And, third, we commemorate the fact of Handel himself having conducted annual performances of *The Messiah* in London, from 1750, to raise charitable funds – in his case, for the Great Ormond Street Hospital.

After finding the news unbearable to watch in the immediate aftermath of not watching any television for months because of literally working round the clock doing my reduced orchestrations of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* (1999) and the Verdi *Requiem* (2000, USA 2007) – which enable choirs of 80+ to perform these masterpieces and are now regularly performed throughout the UK - I can categorically state that the daily violence of natural and man-made disasters and violent crime in the national news desensitises us – perhaps as a way of protecting ourselves? Further, it is sometimes difficult to comprehend the real implications of numbers when there are so many banded about like confetti.

Instead of a single summer break, my family and I decided to do several mini breaks when the UK weather looked promising. For our first we stayed for just one night in a family room on the 6th storey of a hotel. When we checked-in and were handed the room key we were given directions to the 6th floor. But, it was only when we looked out that we both had a wonderful view out to sea but also truly felt the enormous height. The next day, after breakfast, I suggested we try out the fast lift for floors 7-12 up to floor 7 and then walk down a floor. My young son asked if we could go to the 12th floor. Another couple had done the same and suggested we take the stairs to join them on the 13th floor. It was then and feeling really uncomfortable with the height, even though inside, that the news stories of the Grenfell Tower survivors escaping and heroically leading youngsters to safety from even higher floors just over a month before suddenly really hit us. Walking down the 12 flights of stairs prior to breakfast had already really hammered home the height of our 6 storeys high room, and made us all wonder what it must have been like for Grenfell Tower residents, three and four times higher and being pursued by flames: horrendous and traumatic beyond comprehension.

My mind has since turned to the estimated numbers who perished: truly horrifying when equated to the number of neighbouring households which would have been lost had there been a similar disaster in my road.

So to tonight's performance. For me the starkness of the very opening of *The Messiah* in the aftermath of disasters, is asking, in music, the age-old theological question as to why God allows such disasters to happen. The words 'Comfort ye', sung by the solo tenor quickly came to mind and so perhaps all we can do in response to that unanswerable question is to cling on to the hopes and beliefs Handel set 275 years ago, in *The Messiah*: another reason I chose it, rather than a Requiem, given this fund-raising is to help survivors look forward and rebuild their lives.

David Meacock – conductor/tenor

After studies at the Royal College of Music, where he was the first student to direct a Mozart piano concerto from the keyboard and at Reading University for a Masters, David has enjoyed a varied career as a pianist, conductor and more recently as a solo tenor, often combining these in the same concert.

Performances have included piano concertos by Beethoven, Grieg, Liszt, Rachmaninoff, Tchaikovsky and his own transcriptions and he has conducted much of the core choral and orchestral repertoire, including all nine Beethoven Symphonies. Solo tenor performances have included the Verdi *Requiem*, Liszt's amazing Psalm 13 and opera arias outdoors – the largest audience being 7,000. David's flexi-chamber orchestration of Parry *I was Glad* (pub. Novello) is performed World-wide. He is currently completing a booklet entitled *Singing made easy in 7 Steps: Discover bel canto essentials every choir singer should know, but are rarely shown*. It will have a supporting recording. One of the UK's largest on-line choral distributors, Choraline, has already agreed to take it on and initial drafts have had very encouraging feedback from professional and amateur singers alike.

Like his wife Kate, in between playing tennis or table tennis with their two children, and doing gardening and ambitious DIY, David enjoys teaching the piano with supporting theory to all ages and standards.

Hundreds are now using David's invention *Postie Mate* to deliver leaflets safely – which won the Bucks SME New Business of the Year Award and so is in the national finals, taking place in Wembley Stadium in December.

Milly Forrest - soprano

London-born soprano Milly Forrest graduated with First Class honours from the Royal Academy of Music undergraduate course and is now doing her Masters at the Royal College of Music. Milly made national media headlines when she was asked by the Director of the Wigmore Hall to step in for the last song concert of the season on the 29th of July – with rave reviews. She sang alongside Elizabeth Watts, Mary Bevan, Benjamin Appl and many others. On the operatic stage Milly has sung Susanna from Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Clorinda from *La Cenerentola* by Rossini, Nora from *Riders to the Sea*, Vaughan Williams and Fiordiligi from Mozart's *Così fan tutte*.

Lindsay Bramley – contralto

Lindsay read Music at Oxford as an academic scholar. She was born in Marlow, Buckinghamshire and originally studied as a pianist, but started singing at university and has since sung throughout the UK, in France, Austria, Canada and Israel. She studies singing with Alison Wells, and lives in Berkshire with her husband Tim and two children.

Lindsay specialises in 20th/21st Century music, favourite roles including Miss Donnithorne *Miss Donnithorne's Maggot* and the title role in *The Medium* (Maxwell Davies), Theodora the Prostitute in *The Judgement of Theodora* (ENO studio) and Michael Howard/Tony Blair *Newsnight: The Opera* (Battersea Arts Centre). She is a regular performer at Opera Holland Park and Grimeborn Festival, and is currently working on a new opera to be premiered at the Royal Opera House Linbury Studio in 2019.

In 2009 Lindsay began also working as a conductor and has now conducted several productions of her own as well as assisting for Co Opera, Opera up Close and Tête a Tête. She is the regular conductor of Richmond Opera. She has this year also branched out into writing, producing a new libretto for *The Impresario/Bastien & Bastienne* and *The Silken Ladder/A Husband at the Door* for Opera Alegria.

John Lofthouse - baritone

Originally from Levens in the Lake District, John studied Theology at Durham University before teaching Religious Studies at Alleyn's School in Dulwich. He subsequently trained as a classical singer at the

Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the National Opera Studio. John now lives in Hampshire with his wife, two daughters, a red dog and various small animals in cages. Aside from singing, John sometimes teaches Religion & Philosophy and rides a motorbike.

Recent operatic roles include the White Knight in *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland* at the Royal Opera House; Amantio *Gianni Schicchi* and Frank *Die Fledermaus* for Opera Holland Park; and the cover of Figaro *The Barber of Seville* for ENO. Concert performances include Bach *Christmas Oratorio* and Stainer's *The Crucifixion* in Germany, Vaughan Williams' *Sea Symphony* in Chichester Cathedral, Handel's *The Messiah* in Carlisle, Portsmouth & Liverpool Cathedrals and Mozart's *Requiem* in the Royal Albert Hall. John has previously sung *The Messiah* with A40 Choir and is delighted to join them again tonight.

Future plans include performances of Puccini's *La Boheme* with Opera Brava, an Opera Gala at the Basingstoke Anvil and Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* in Romania.