

About the composer

HERBERT HOWELLS was born in Lydney, Gloucester on 17 October 1892. He showed a keen interest in composition early in his life and, at the age of eighteen, became a pupil of Herbert Brewer, Organist of Gloucester Cathedral. In 1912 he was awarded a scholarship to the Royal College of Music and studied under Charles Villiers Stanford, Walter Parratt, Charles Wood and Hubert Parry.

Unlike his close friend and mentor, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Howells never collected or made direct use of folk songs. He did, however, accept their importance as part of a wider musical heritage but preferred to allow church modes and the pentatonic scale to play a more prominent part in the construction of his output. The move away from secular to sacred music after *Hymus Paradisi* (1938) continued into the 1940s with a series of compositions setting Mass texts and Canticles, most notably the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis from the Anglican Evensong service.

Herbert Howells died in London on 23 February 1983 at the age of 90. During his life he has been awarded a Collard Life Fellowship (Worshipful Company of Musicians), CBE (1953) and in 1972 was made a Companion of Honour.¹

Collegium Regale

Collegium Regale is a thrilling set of canticles for Matins, Evensong and the Communion Service, written by Howells for King's College, Cambridge. He began writing in 1941 when he was acting organist at St John's College, Cambridge, while the then organist was away during the war. As the story goes, Howells was at a party with the Dean of Kings, the Director of College Music, and the Organist of Gonville and Caius College. They bet Howells that he would not write a service for the college. Thankfully, he won the bet and finished the morning service (*Te Deum and Jubilate*) in 1944, and the evening service (*Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis*) in 1945. He returned to the *Collegium Regale* in 1965 to write the *Communion Service*, from which comes the *Gloria* you will hear today.

In his time, Howells was known to be a brilliant improviser and an expert in harmony and counterpoint. In *Collegium Regale*, he varies the following themes in every piece, excluding the *Jubilate*. Try to listen out for them as you hear the *Gloria* and *Te Deum*.



¹ *Wise Music Classical*

In the Te Deum, we are taken on an eight-minute-long journey from a pastoral beginning to a powerful end, strengthened by the last words in the final section.

O Lord, save thy people, and bless thine heritage;
Govern them, and lift them up for ever.
Day by day we magnify thee;
And we worship thy Name, ever world without end.
Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin.
O Lord, have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us.
O Lord, let thy mercy lighten upon us, as our trust is in thee.
O Lord, in thee have I trusted: let me never be confounded.

Requiem (1936)

The Requiem is still a relatively unknown work by Howells; it was not known of until the score was discovered by one of his students among his personal items at the Royal College of Music (where he was a professor). Howells was unwilling to publish it at first, believing it to be an immature example of his work, but he did relent, and the work was published in 1980 or 1981. Usually, the requiem is thought of as a tribute to his son Michael, but John Bawden provides new insights as to why it might have been written:

Until quite recently, it was thought that the *Requiem* was composed in response to Michael's death, but we now know that Howells composed it in 1932 or 1933, originally intending it for the choir of King's College, Cambridge. For some reason, the music was never sent to King's, and its existence remained unknown until its eventual publication in 1980, only three years before the composer's own death. After the tragic events of 1935, Howells increasingly associated the *Requiem* with his lost son, so much so that a few years later, when he was composing *Hymnus Paradisi*, a work specifically intended as Michael's memorial and without doubt Howells' masterpiece, he used substantial parts of the earlier *Requiem*, re-scoring it for soloists, large chorus and orchestra.²

Whatever the reason for its composition, the Requiem is a beautiful and deeply intimate choral work that takes the listener on a journey through grief, joy, and hope through the beautiful harmonies and inspiring texts:

² https://www.choirs.org.uk/prognotes/howells_requiem1.htm

I. Salvator mundi

O Saviour of the world who by thy cross and precious blood hast redeemed us, save us and help us; We humbly beseech thee, O Lord.

II. Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd; / therefore can I lack nothing.
He shall feed me in a green pasture, / and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort.
He shall convert my soul, / and bring me forth in the paths of righteousness, for his Name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; thy rod and thy staff comfort me.
Thou shalt prepare a table before me in the presence of them that trouble me; / thou hast anointed my head with oil, and my cup shall be full.
But thy loving-kindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; / and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

III & V. Requiem I, II.

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine
Et lux perpetua luceat eis.

*Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord
And light perpetual shine upon him.*

IV. Psalm 121.

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills: / From whence cometh my help?
My help cometh even from the Lord, / who hath made heaven and earth.
He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: / and he that keepeth thee will not sleep.
Behold, he that keepeth Israel / shall neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord himself is thy keeper: / the Lord is thy defence upon thy right hand;
So that the sun shall not burn thee by day, / neither the moon by night.
The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: / yea, it is even he that shall keep thy soul.
The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in, / from this time forth for evermore.

VI. I heard a voice from Heaven

I heard a voice from Heaven saying unto me, write: "From henceforth, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." Even so, saith the spirit, "For they rest from their labours."

All of our thanks are due to **Laurence Williams**, Director of Music at St Paul's, for the use of this beautiful and newly-renovated space for our rehearsals and performance, and for his integral encouragement and assistance in creating this event. Thank you to **Olivia Allen** for her excellent playing during our rehearsal process. Thank you to the talented singers of the **Concentus Consort** for giving their time to learn and perform these beautiful works. Thanks to **YOU, our patrons**, for coming to support us today. We hope you enjoy the performance.