



ALDEBURGH MUSIC CLUB

Saturday 16 December 2023

St Bartholomew's Church, Orford

ALDEBURGH MUSIC CLUB CHOIR Music Director **TOM APPLETON**
with Miriam Keogh *Harp* and Adrian Nicholson *Organ*

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976): A Ceremony of Carols (Op 28, 1942)

Arranged for SATB and Harp by Julius Harrison (1955)

Procession	
Wolcum Yole!	<i>Anon, 14th century</i>
There is No Rose	<i>Anon, 14th century</i>
That Yongë Child*	<i>Anon, 14th century</i>
Balulalow**	<i>James, John and Robert Wedderburn 1548/1561</i>
As Dew in Aprille	<i>Anon, c 1400</i>
This Little Babe	<i>Robert Southwell (1561?-1595)</i>
Interlude	
In Freezing Winter Night***	<i>Robert Southwell (1561?-1595)</i>
Spring Carol	<i>William Cornish (14?-1523)</i>
Deo Gracias!	<i>Anon, 15th century</i>
Recession	

soloists *Maria Chapman-Bear **Wendy Marshall ***Joy Marsh and Sue Foster

followed by

Carols for Choir and Audience

There is no interval; please join us after the concert for mulled wine and mince pies

In 1939, Benjamin Britten and a troupe of creatives left the UK for America. Protesting against the UK's involvement in the war, Britten went to find himself both musically and personally. One of the pieces he writes there is the operetta *Paul Bunyan* with a libretto by long-standing mentor WH Auden. *Paul Bunyan* focuses on American Folklore. A giant has a pet cow, there's a moon which turns blue, immigrant lumberjacks, and railroads - what a way to try to endear yourself in a new homeland. But after America's entry to the war, and without any real major musical successes behind him, he must have surely been fairly despondent. Despite his growing relationship with Peter Pears being nurtured whilst in America, it is perhaps *Hymn to St. Cecilia* which is his greatest achievement from this time. A piece, once again with text by Auden, that sort of says 'It's OK, Benjy, you're going to go on to great things!'. Well, where better to start - when trying to do great things - than at base camp.

A Ceremony of Carols was written on the boat home from America in 1942 - with the MS Axel Johnson dodging German U-Boats as it crossed the Atlantic. In this context, with Britten homesick, living in daily fear during the crossing, and more generally in need of a career boost, this is a work which helps one feel grounded. Britten deliberately keeps much of the original medieval language; he uses Latin too, but he adds a sense of hope and energy - especially in the harp writing. Britten is looking back at his nation's heritage in the hope that it can inspire a new dawn.

From this ancient inspiration, Britten returns home and begins to build his own world - one that he can control. From the first performance of *Ceremony of Carols* in Norwich in 1942, we can track a line for much of the rest of his life, where East Anglia becomes his muse, his community, his joy. East Anglia - and Aldeburgh of course - becomes his place. For me, *A Ceremony of Carols* is the start of much of that which we now admire about Britten's life. Looking backwards gives us roots and helps our future blossom.

Tom Appleton

