KENNETH LEIGHTON
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KENNETH LEIGHTON
(1929–1988)

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NEIL MACKIE tenor †
THE CHOIR OF ST PAUL’S CATHEDRAL
ANDREW LUCAS organ
JOHN SCOTT conductor
KENNETH LEIGHTON was one of the most successful British composers who lived and worked in the latter half of the twentieth century. This is a mighty claim, certainly, which some might dispute but which his most ardent devotees would uphold with all the fervour and conviction of a religious campaign. Yet Leighton’s work has been described merely as ‘musicians’ music’ and quite simply deserves wider acclaim. This recording provides the opportunity to hear the composer’s principal church music.

Kenneth Leighton was born in Wakefield, Yorkshire, in 1929 and became a chorister at the cathedral there. He remained faithful to his Yorkshire upbringing, commenting: ‘Any natural composer is a product of his background, experience and training, and I like to think that my music has the characteristic Yorkshire qualities which have been described as vigour, forthrightness and emotionalism tempered by common sense.’

In 1947 Leighton went up to Queen’s College in Oxford with a Hastings Scholarship in classics, and it was in that discipline that he graduated in 1951 with his Bachelor of Arts. He also studied for his Bachelor of Music with Bernard Rose and graduated in the same year. After the Second World War, many young British composers sought enlightenment in new techniques of composition by going to study abroad in order to free themselves of what Leighton himself described as a ‘narrowly British’ background. A Mendelssohn Scholarship (won at the end of his final year at Oxford) enabled him to go to study with Petrassi in Rome.

Goffredo Petrassi was significantly influenced by Hindemith’s ‘neo-classicism’ and also by Alfredo Casella, another Italian composer who had studied at the Paris Conservatoire and who developed a highly chromatic style which was influenced by Stravinsky, Bartók and Schoenberg. This turned into a Stravinskian neo-Classicism, and served as a point of departure for Petrassi. The dynamic nature of Petrassi’s approach to musical composition certainly had a profound effect on Leighton whose vigorous and chromatic style owes something to Berg rather than Schoenberg in that a twelve-tone approach to composition was not as rigorously pursued as in Schoenberg’s later style.

Petrassi was influenced by Hindemith’s Classical orientation and (like Leighton) was a chorister, coming into contact in his formative years with the polyphonic composers of the Renaissance. Clarity of texture remained a prime ingredient in Leighton’s work and he remained faithful to the concept of counterpoint and fugue. He was also a gifted pianist who believed that much could be contributed to the piano repertoire, particularly in terms of contrapuntal writing. His piano works and other music from the 1950s contained atonal fugues and chorale sections – another important aspect of Leighton’s approach to musical
form. His *Fantasia contrappuntistica* won the Busoni Prize in 1956 and his appointment to Edinburgh University in 1956 was as lecturer in counterpoint.

Leighton’s study in Rome alerted him to the twelve-note techniques of Dallapiccola and the Second Viennese School. Deryck Cooke has noted that Leighton’s lyrical instinct clearly shaped his attitude to serial techniques; despite his interest in this method of composition, ‘at heart Leighton is still a Romantic’. His period of study with Petrassi did not encourage ‘mere abstractions’ in his work.

The listener who is acquainted with Leighton’s work will have noticed the recurrent use of various intervals, particularly the augmented fourth or tritone. This use of ‘characteristic intervals’ can be noted in other composers’ work in the 1960s – in the first movement of Britten’s *War Requiem* or in John McCabe’s *Dies resurrectionis*. Leighton believed that the twelve-note technique was the most important addition to the contemporary composer’s tool box, but that it shared a role with intervallic or vertical patterns which provide an intrinsic ‘logic and impetus in place of the old feeling of chord progression’. Thus Leighton’s use of a free chromatic technique often had very strong tonal implications which went hand in hand with the development of the music’s form.

Leighton had an interest in rapid, short, muscular, rhythmic figures (perhaps as in some of Howells’s later work); it is a very prominent characteristic and one of this composer’s hallmarks. It is his use of syncopation and the development of rhythmic cells and ostinati, combined with the various influences and techniques outlined above, which are the characteristic fingerprints of Leighton’s style.

Leighton was showered with prizes from his early twenties: the Royal Philharmonic Society Prize, the George Butterworth Award, the Harry Danks Prize, the coveted Busoni Prize, the City of Trieste Prize, the Bernhard Sprengel Prize, the Cobbett medal for his distinguished services to chamber music and the National Federation of Music Societies Prize. In 1970 he was awarded a Doctorate in Music by the University of Oxford. Further accolades followed in 1977 with the award of an Honorary Doctorate from the University of St Andrews and in 1982 he was made an Honorary Fellow of The Royal College of Music.

Much of Kenneth Leighton’s life was spent working at the University of Edinburgh where he was appointed as a Senior Lecturer in 1963. In 1967 he became a Reader and in the following year he succeeded Edmund Rubbra as Fellow in Music at Worcester College, Oxford, before returning to Edinburgh as Reid Professor of Music in 1970, a post he retained until his death. John Scott, the conductor of St Paul’s Cathedral Choir on this recording, was one of his pupils during this period.
Many contemporary composers fight shy of church music. Some approach the task of composing for the liturgy in a more reserved vein, adopting something akin to the worst kind of fake piety in their music which had bedevilled the Victorian composers. Leighton never had any such problems in writing for the church and remained faithful to his days as a chorister. Why did he write so much religious music? In his own words: ‘This has something to do with my upbringing and with my boyhood as a cathedral chorister. This is perhaps why I respond emotionally to Christian subjects and texts … church music is undoubtedly a channel of communication for me … early experiences are of immense and fundamental importance in musical as in all other kinds of development; and I therefore speak as one who comes from inside the church.’

In addition to his church music Leighton left an important legacy of works for organ, not to mention chamber music, instrumental works, three symphonies and an opera. He readily acknowledged his indebtedness to Vaughan Williams, Rubbra and Walton whose influence he seemed to have shed by the time he had written his first major choral offering, *The Light Invisible*, in 1958. Giles Easterbrook has summarized the trends in Leighton’s music as follows: ‘The works of his early maturity show a continuing desire to explore new forms, and to increase and crystallize his contrapuntal mastery with ever greater expressive force. The tremendous emotional tension he produced was always organically generated and devoid of gesture. Later scores displayed a greater concern with vertical methods, but with no diminution of his command of counterpoint. With the pieces of his last years, it became increasingly noticeable that a more relaxed and positive element had entered into his compositions, a new, lyrical vein: not a reduction of strength or purpose, more a shedding of some of the intense introspection which was such a feature of some of the scores from the late 1960s onwards. This broadening of his emotional range can only make us regret that he did not complete the fourth symphony which he was contemplating at the time of his death.’

The *Te Deum laudamus* dates from 1964 and is scored for soprano and baritone solo, chorus and organ. The music was written in honour of St Cecilia for a festival service at St Sepulchre’s Church, Holborn, London, where it was first performed on 24 November 1964. On this recording only the baritone soloist is heard (at the words ‘We therefore pray thee help thy servants’) and the soprano solos are sung by the boys. In 1966 the composer orchestrated the work, removing all but one of the solo passages and indicating alternative semi-chorus readings in order to effect a better balance with the orchestral texture.

The *Missa Brevis*, Op 50, was written for the choir of Liverpool Cathedral and was published in 1968. It has become one of the most popular choral settings of the communion service by a contemporary composer and is regularly heard at cathedrals and
churches throughout Britain and America. The five movements heard here are ‘Kyrie eleison’, ‘Sanctus’, ‘Benedictus’, ‘Agnus Dei’ and ‘Gloria in excelsis Deo’. The order follows that of the Book of Common Prayer in which the ‘Gloria’ is sung after communion.

Of all the works recorded here, the carol Lully, lulla, thou little tiny child, Op 25b, is the earliest composition. It was published in 1956 and is the second in a set of three carols for soprano soloist and chorus (the combination of soloist and chorus was favoured by Leighton) and has earned a place in most proficient choirs’ Christmas repertoire. The harmonies are noticeably more tonal – opening in the key of A minor – and the work contains much less of the chromaticism which was to characterize Leighton’s later music.

Crucifixus pro nobis, Op 38, dates from 1961 and was written for David Lumsden and the Choir of New College, Oxford. This cantata is scored for tenor or soprano soloist, chorus and organ. Here the part is sung by Neil Mackie who commissioned the composer to write a song cycle Earth, Sweet Earth (1988).

Crucifixus pro nobis is the most substantial of the works on this recording and is divided into four movements: ‘Christ in the Cradle’, ‘Christ in the Garden’, ‘Christ in His Passion’ and ‘Hymn’. The rather chilling and atmospheric first movement is for tenor alone, in contrast to the second movement which is for choir alone. The movement surges to a climax at the words ‘He only breathes a sigh’ where the choral writing breaks briefly into six parts before the atmosphere of the first movement returns over long, held pedal notes for the final phrases of the stanza.

The third movement combines both soloist and chorus. The soloist begins and the sense of restlessness is generated by the repeated semitone crotchet movement in the organ part. A central questioning six-part section ‘Why did he shake for cold?’ builds up to a climax before the movement concludes in the most bleak fashion. It is then, at this moment of despair, that Leighton plays his masterstroke in presenting the final ‘Hymn’ with sonorous harmonies.

In the early 1960s the writer André Hodeir boldly declared that Messiaen had been ‘defeated by the obstacle which has been the stumbling block of every composer since Debussy: form’. It is interesting that the construction of Leighton’s music always seems wholesome and complete. Many contemporary composers have struggled with form. Milner has observed that Leighton’s musical climaxes arise out of the growth of the music itself, and are not artificially contrived. Despite the composer’s use of tried and tested musical building blocks (such as fugue), Leighton rarely seems uncertain as to the direction of his music. Writing of his own organ work Martyrs: Dialogues on a Scottish
Psalm-tune (1976), Leighton confessed to his admiration of the Dorian, rock-like quality of the hymn tune ‘Martyrs’ (1610), a hymn which he also used to conclude his sequence of psalms Laudes Montium written in 1975. The hymn tunes and plainsong which the composer experienced as a chorister have remained an inspiration, appearing throughout his compositional output, including his second symphony.

Returning to the fourth and final section of Crucifixus pro nobis, Leighton uses the largely homophonic movement of his hymn-type movement to ease the disquiet of the previous three movements and very effectively turns the intense questioning of the work into the hope of the resurrection.

The setting of the evening canticles known as The Second Service, Op 62, was commissioned by the Cathedral Organists’ Association and bears the dedication ‘In Memorian Brian Runnett’. Runnett was the talented Organist and Master of the Choristers at Norwich Cathedral and part-time lecturer at the University of East Anglia who was tragically killed in a car accident.

The Magnificat opens with carefully constructed note clusters in compound time which support and answer the treble voices. Repeated rhythmic figures develop in the organ accompaniment which in turn give way to further rhythmic interest. The opening mood returns in the ‘Gloria’ and the music comes to rest quietly but inevitably on a chord of C sharp major.

The vocal parts of the Nunc dimittis begin in a mood reminiscent of the final movement of Crucifixus pro nobis. As in the Magnificat, the opening mood of the Nunc dimittis is re-established in the ‘Gloria’. The dissonances in the final ‘Amen’ yield a chord of F major and the canticles end as gently as they began.

An Evening Hymn, for soprano solo and unaccompanied choir, was commissioned by the Chichester Festival with funds provided by the Southern Arts Association. The first performance was given by Chichester Cathedral choir conducted by John Birch on 17 July 1979. The opening harmonies give way to a faster, more rhythmic section in compound time at the words ‘Thou whose nature cannot sleep’. After a mighty climax the opening harmonies return once more to close the work.

Let all the world in every corner sing was commissioned for the church of St Matthew, Northampton, and was first performed on the eve of St Matthew, 20 September 1965, conducted by Michael Nicholas. Written in the rhythmic and syncopated idiom so readily associated with this composer, the anthem is a paean admirably capturing the well known joyful poetry by George Herbert.
Te Deum laudamus

1 We praise thee O God: we acknowledge thee to be the Lord. All the earth doth worship thee: the Father everlasting. To thee all Angels cry aloud: the Heavens and all the powers therein. To thee Cherubim and Seraphim: continually do cry, Holy Holy Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth; Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty of thy Glory. The glorious company of the Apostles praise thee. The goodly fellowship of the Prophets praise thee. The holy Church throughout all the world doth acknowledge thee The father of an infinite Majesty; Thine honourable true and only Son; Also the Holy Ghost, the Comforter. Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ. Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father. When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb. When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers. Thou sittest at the right hand of God in the Glory of the Father. We believe that thou shalt come: to be our Judge. We therefore pray thee help thy servants whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood. Make them to be numbered with thy Saints in glory everlasting. 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.

BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

Missa Brevis


3 Holy, holy, holy Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory: Glory be to thee, O Lord most high.

4 Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

5 O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, grant us thy peace.

6 Glory be to God on high, and in earth peace, good will towards men. We praise thee, we bless thee, we worship thee, we glorify thee, we give thanks to thee for thy great glory, O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty. O Lord, the only-begotten Son Jesu Christ; O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Thou that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Thou that takest away the sins of the world, receive our prayer. Thou that sittest at the right hand of God the Father, have mercy upon us. For thou only art holy; thou only art the Lord; thou only, O Christ, with the Holy Ghost, art most high in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

Lully, lulla, thou little tiny child

7 Lully, lulla, thou little tiny child, By by, lully, lullay. O sisters too, How may we do For to preserve this day This poor youngling, For whom we sing, By by, lully, lullay? Herod, the king In his raging, Charged he hath this day His men of might, In his own sight, All children young to slay. That woe is me, Poor child for thee! And every morn and day, For thy parting Nor say nor sing By by, lully, lullay!

PAGEANT OF THE SHEARMEN AND TAILORS, COVENTRY
Crucifixus pro nobis
CHRIST IN THE CRADLE

Look, how he shakes for cold!
How pale his lips are grown!
Wherein his limbs to fold
Yet mantle has he none.
His pretty feet and hands
(Of late more pure and white
Than is the snow
That pains them so)
Have lost their candour quite.
His lips are blue
(Where roses grew).
He’s frozen everywhere:
All th’ heat he has Joseph, alas,
Gives in a groan: or Mary in a tear.

CHRIST IN THE GARDEN

Look, how he glows for heat!
What flames come from his eyes!
’Tis blood that he does sweat,
Blood his bright forehead dyes:
See, see! It trickles down:
Look, how it showers amain!
Through every pore
His blood runs o’er,
And empty leaves each vein.
His very heart
Burns in each part;
A fire his breast doth sear:
For all this flame,
To cool the same
He only breathes a sigh, and weeps a tear.

CHRIST IN HIS PASSION

What bruises do I see!
What hideous stripes are those!
Could any cruel be
Enough, to give such blows?
Look, how they bind his arms
And vex his soul with scorns,
Upon his hair
They make him wear
A crown of piercing thorns.
Through hands and feet
Sharp nails they beat:
And now the cross they rear:
Many look on;
But only John
Stands by to sigh, Mary to shed a tear.

Why did he shake for cold?
Why did he glow for heat?
Dissolve that frost he could,
He could call back that sweat.
Those bruises, stripes, bonds, taunts,
Those thorns, which thou didst see,
Those nails, that cross,
His own life’s loss,
Why, oh, why suffered he?
’Twas for thy sake.
Thou, thou didst make Him all those torments bear:
If then his love
Do thy soul move,
Sigh out a groan, weep down a melting tear.

PARTICK CAREY (d1651)

HYMN

Drop, drop, slow tears,
And bathe those beauteous feet
Which brought from Heaven
The news and Prince of Peace;
Cease not, wet eyes,
His mercies to entreat;
To cry for vengeance
Sin doth never cease.
In your deep floods
Drown all my faults and fears;
Nor let His eye
See sin, but through my tears.

PHINEAS FLETCHER (1582–1650)
The Second Service

My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden. For behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath magnified me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him throughout all generations. He hath shewed strength with his arm: he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble and meek. He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich he hath sent empty away. He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared in the sight of all people: to be a light to lighten the gentiles and to be the glory of thy people Israel. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.

An Evening Hymn

The night is come, like to the day; Depart not Thou, great God, away. Let not my sins, black as the night, Eclipse the lustre of thy light. Keep still in my horizon; for to me The sun makes not the day, but thee. Thou whose nature cannot sleep, On my temples sentry keep! Guard me 'gainst the watchful foes, Whose eyes are open while mine close, Let no dreams my head infest, But such as Jacob’s temples blest.

While I do rest, my soul advance, Make my sleep a holy trance. That I may, my rest being wrought, Awake, into some holy thought. And with an active vigour run My course as doth the nimble sun. Sleep is a death; Oh! make me try, By sleeping, what it is to die: And as gently lay my head On my grave, as now my bed. Howe’er I rest, great God, let me Awake again at last with thee, And thus assured, behold I lie Securely, or to wake or die. Oh! come that hour, when I shall never Sleep again, but wake for ever! SIR THOMAS BROWNE (1605–1682)

Let all the world in every corner sing

Let all the world in every corner sing, My God and King! The heavens are not too high, His praise may thither fly: The earth is not too low, His praises there may grow. Let all the world in every corner sing, My God and King! Let all the world in every corner sing, My God and King! The Church with psalms must shout, No door can keep them out; But above all the heart Must bear the longest part. Let all the world in every corner sing, My God and King! GEORGE HERBERT (1593–1633)
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