

Canticles of Light

Bob Chilcott (b.1955)

Te lucis ante terminum
Christe qui splendor et dies
O nata lux de lumine

Bob Chilcott is one of the busiest and most popular choral composers and conductors in Britain today. He has been involved in choral music for most of his life. He was a boy chorister and then a tenor choral scholar in the choir of King's College, Cambridge, and later sang with, composed and arranged for the celebrated King's Singers. Since 1997 he has worked as a full-time composer. Today, Bob is in great demand internationally as composer, conductor and choral consultant. He has been invited to appear at many important international festivals, and has worked with some of the world's leading choral ensembles. At home, he is currently Principal Guest Conductor of the BBC Singers.

Bob Chilcott's singing experience has given him an inside knowledge of an exceptionally wide range of music, and this is reflected in the eclectic nature of his own compositions which, whilst remaining within the mainstream English choral tradition, are variously inspired by folksongs, Gregorian chant, Anglican hymns, spirituals, jazz, close-harmony, gospel and African music.

Canticles of Light was commissioned in 2000 by Winchester Music Club in celebration of the 75th anniversary of its foundation by Sir George Dyson. The piece comprises three ancient Latin hymns that were in widespread use at least as early as the 10th century. The first two are evening hymns that ask for God's protection and comfort through the night. The third hymn is a song for the morning, anticipating the renewed strength and hope that the day will bring.

The work is written for chorus and small orchestra, with a significant part for a choir of trebles or young voices, who in the two outer movements chant plainsong-like phrases above the main chorus. There are further parallels with the ancient and timeless art of plainsong in the scale-wise melodic contours and rhythmic independence of the main choral writing whilst, at the other end of the musical timeline, Chilcott's experience as a member of the King's Singers is readily apparent in his skilful use of close-harmony techniques. His expert synthesis of these seemingly disparate elements has resulted in a musical language of considerable expressive power, eloquently conveying in these three short pieces a reassuring message of hope and renewal.

programme notes by John Bawden

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