

FRANCIS GRIER

Francis Grier was a chorister at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, the first music scholar at Eton College, and then organ scholar at King's College, Cambridge. He studied the piano with Joseph Cooper, Fanny Waterman and Bernard Roberts, and the organ with Sidney Campbell and Gillian Weir. After Cambridge where he had worked under Sir David Willcocks and Philip Ledger at King's, he became Simon Preston's assistant at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, and succeeded him as Organist and Tutor in Music in 1981, at the age of 25. During this period he made many recordings and TV and radio broadcasts, as organist and chamber music pianist. At Christ Church he commissioned new works by leading composers for the choir. In 1985 he resigned his appointments in order to explore options that are unavailable to full-time musicians: he studied music, theology and meditation in India, and then worked with people with learning difficulties in communities in London and Bangalore. Since 1989 he has been based in England again, and divides his time between music and psychoanalysis. He is a Training Analyst and Supervisor for the British Psycho-Analytical Society, and Editor-In-Chief of the International Journal of Psychoanalysis.

He has been commissioned to write numerous works for the BBC, various cathedral and collegiate foundations, and in 1996 a setting of Psalm 150 as a birthday present for the Queen. 1996 also saw *Embracing The Tiger* commissioned by the Quaker Festival Orchestra and Chorus, and *The Virgin has given birth to a Saviour* for choir and harp, written for Philip Brunelle's Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis. Various CDs of Francis Grier's music have been released. In 1993 the Rodolfus Choir under their director Ralph Allwood issued a CD of his *Sequence for the Ascension*, described by *Gramophone* as "an unspeakably beautiful work." This association with Ralph Allwood followed Ralph's commissioning of an opera, *St Francis*, for performance by Eton College and the National Youth Music Theatre in 1992. In March 1996, a CD of choral music performed by the Rudolfus Choir under Ralph Allwood, *12 Anthems*, was described by the BBC Music Magazine as "beautifully thought out, imaginative, varied, inventive writing for choir... Sheer pleasure."

In 2000 Stephen Darlington, the Choir of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, the Oxford University Chamber Orchestra and soloists gave the first performance of another large-scale work, *Around the Curve of the World*, commissioned to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of the city of Christchurch, New Zealand. This work was given several performances, including the opening concert of the Canterbury Festival, and in the anniversary celebrations in Christchurch itself. It has been performed again in November 2009 by the Nottingham Bach Choir. Also in 2000, *A Peal for Westminster*, was performed in London by Lorna Anderson and James Gilchrist, with the pianists Simon Over and Malcolm Martineau. *In Nomine*, an organ work derived from the famous In Nomine of the 16th Century composer John Taverner, was performed for a live broadcast on Radio 3 by the organist David Goode, from Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, as part of the BBC's Organ Night. David Goode has played this work in several recitals since, including, in June 2003, in his Aldeburgh Festival recital.

5 Joyful Mysteries, a large-scale composition commissioned by the BBC, was performed in King's College Chapel, Cambridge in December 2000 by Catherine Bott, the BBC Singers, the choristers of King's and the Endymion Ensemble, conducted by Stephen Cleobury, as part of the European

Broadcasting Union's Christmas broadcast. *Love Without Hope*, a work for soprano, cello and piano originally commissioned by Colin Carr and St John's College, Oxford, in 2000, was performed at the Lincoln Center in New York in March, 2002, by Catherine Bott, Colin Carr and Francis Grier.

With the soprano Dorothee Jansen, Francis Grier has been performing a series of all- Schubert programmes, entitled *Schubert: New Perspectives*. They have given recitals at Bayreuth during the Festival in 2000 and 2001, at Luxembourg, Parma and Geneva in 2002, and at the Bonn Beethovenfest in 2001 and 2002. In 2003 they performed in Florence, at the Wigmore Hall, and appeared again at the Bonn Beethovenfest. In 2004 their concerts included performances in Geneva and Montpellier, and in 2005 in Duisburg. In 2007/8 they performed at the Wigmore Hall, also giving three recitals in the Bonn area, including one at the Beethovenhaus. In July and December 2009 they gave two further Wigmore Hall recitals.

The choir of Westminster Abbey, under the direction of James O'Donnell, recorded his *Missa Trinitatis Sanctae* for Hyperion Records in 2005, and performed it on tour in the USA.

Francis Grier's major new setting of the Passion, to a text by the poet and novelist Elizabeth Cook, commissioned by the BBC and VocalEssence, was given its world premiere in Minneapolis on 11 March 2006. This work was shortlisted for a British Composer Award. The review of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* described the work as:

a modern masterpiece. While the work was clearly an oratorio, composer Francis Grier's setting is really an opera in disguise. This was dramatic music, used to full theatrical effect. The sound was sometimes dense and impenetrable, at others times ethereally translucent. It ranged from full choral clamor to intimate solo reverie. ... the effects were always thrilling.

Its UK premiere was given on 14 April 2006, Good Friday, in King's College Chapel, Cambridge, by the BBC Singers, the King's Choristers, the Endymion Ensemble, directed by Stephen Cleobury. The Independent wrote:

... it's a humdinger of a new work. ... To say "impact", however, would be to understate. Some of this is like a bolt from the blue. Overall, The Passion of Jesus of Nazareth is a work of vital attack, shivering beauty and compelling power, not to mention devotional intensity. Grier's orchestration often shows immense flair, including some ubiquitous use of percussion and elegant, spare detail for solo brass, oboe and flute, plus several Kennedy-like violin solos... This is the most rewarding new English oratorio I have heard since Maxwell Davies' Job...

In January 2008 his two daughters, Savitri (15) and Indira (12), gave the premier of his Double Concerto for violin and cello with the Sarum Orchestra under Howard Moody's direction, at the Salisbury Arts Centre. The work received its second performance in February by the Jupiter Orchestra, also with Howard Moody, at Forest Row, Sussex. John Lubbock, the conductor of the Orchestra of St John's, Smith Square, attended the premiere, and afterwards wrote:

This was a remarkable event, both in terms of the piece itself and also for the amazing performance which these two young musicians gave, incidentally, from memory. The piece consists of three very well contrasted movements of interesting and beautiful music, at times energetic and at times very lyrical, with an interesting orchestral accompaniment of strings and virtuoso percussion. There was a huge variety of timbres and colours. As wonderful as the piece was the playing of the two girls. It was a revelation: they are both extraordinarily gifted and confident, and

the difficult work seemed to pose no problems for either of them. They played it with an amazing degree of knowledge and understanding despite this being the first performance. Altogether a wonderful experience.

The choir of St Thomas' Church, New York City, gave the premier of his *Danobis, quaesumus* on their Dedication Sunday, 5 October 2008, which was subsequently chosen by Clare Stevens as one of her Premieres of the Year for the journal, *Classical Music*.

In March 2010, he gave a performance of the Schumann Piano Concerto with the Cambridge University Chamber Orchestra, directed by Stephen Cleobury, in King's College Chapel. In May 2011 he joined the orchestra in a performance of Mozart's Piano Concerto in C, K. 503.

Francis Grier's large-scale setting of the Mass for St Paul's Cathedral, entitled *Missa Spiritus Sanctus*, for choir and instrumental ensemble, was performed in May 2010, on the Feast of Pentecost, performed by the Cathedral Choir, soloists, and members of the City of London Sinfonia, directed by Andrew Carwood. In May 2011 Andrew Carwood and St Paul's Cathedral Choir premiered a new Mass, entitled *Missa Brevis*. Both Mass settings were shortlisted for British Composer Awards, and the *Missa Brevis* won the award in December 2012.

Also in May 2011, another new work, *A Sequence for St Davids*, commissioned by the St David's Festival, was performed at St Davids by soprano Natalie Clifton-Griffith, cellist Natalie Clein and the Cathedral Choir.

He was commissioned to write a new work for the *Choirbook* for the Queen (to celebrate her Jubilee), a setting of George Herbert's poem *Prayer*, the premiere of which was broadcast live from Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, and which was performed in Glasgow Cathedral for the formal visit to the Queen to the city in July 2012.

The award-winning London-based choir, Pegasus, commissioned and premiered two new works - settings of D H Lawrence poems - in September 2012.

Eton College Chapel Choir commissioned a new work, *Audi filia et vide et inclina aurem tuam*, to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of the Queen's Coronation, in May 2012. Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, commissioned a major new setting of the Mass, *Missa Aedes Christi*, for performance in June 2013, which was also danced by the Ballet Rambert Dance School.

As a prize for his British Composer Award, the Worshipful Company of Musicians commissioned him to write a new work, "*...at midnight*", for their Carol service in December 2013. Ralph Allwood also commissioned him to write a new work for the 30 th anniversary of the Rudolfus Choir which was performed on New Year's Eve, 2013, at St John's, Smith Square, by the Rudolfus Choir and Inner Voices.

The choir of King's College Cambridge, under the direction of Stephen Cleobury, premiered his new major setting of the Vespers, entitled *lit by holy fire*, set to poems by Elizabeth Cook, in June 2014: they released a CD recording of this performance in 2018. Also in June 2014, the choir of Caius College Cambridge, under the direction of Geoffrey Webber, premiered his setting of a mediaeval Marian poem, *Cantemus*, at the Spitalfields Festival.

For Holy Week 2015, the Philharmonia Voices (director Aidan Oliver) filmed performances of his

Sword in the Soul in King's College Chapel, Cambridge, one film of each movement presented on the King's Chapel website each day between Palm Sunday and Easter Day. The London Festival of Contemporary Church Music commissioned a motet – *Vox Nostra* – in May 2015. The “Orgelbuchlein Project” commissioned a chorale prelude for organ - *Wir haben schwerlich* - performed in the Oundle Festival by Ann Elise Smoot in July 2015. In the autumn he wrote a set of Evening Canticles for the choir of St Thomas's, New York, at the suggestion of the Rector, in memory of his dear friend John Scott, the organist of St Thomas's, who tragically died in July. Earlier in the year he had written a setting of *Panis Angelicus* in memory of another dear friend who had died tragically young, David Trendell, which was recorded by the choir of King's College London, where David had been Director of Music.

In 2016 the Rodolfus Choir and their director Ralph Allwood asked for a new setting of the Evening Canticles which they performed in a BBC Radio 3 Broadcast Evensong on 28 December. And for the York Minster Carol Service, 2017, the organist, Robert Sharp, has commissioned a new setting of Ave Maris Stella.

In 2018 a CD was released of his organ music performed by Tom Winpenny in St Albans Cathedral. The Rodolfus Choir released a CD of music by Francis and John Tavener in 2021.

Recent recordings of his work have included his organ music by Tom Winpenny in St Alban's Cathedral and Stephen Farr in Merton College, Oxford, the latter also featuring Indira. 2023 also saw a recording of three carols for a CD of Christmas music sung by the choir of the Chapel Royal, Hampton Court, and *Sword in the Soul* recorded by Michael Waldron and the London Choral Sinfonia.

Francis is currently working on compositions for performance in 2025 by the choirs of Bath Abbey and Clare College, Cambridge.

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