

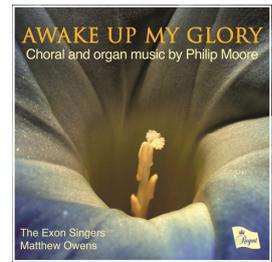
CD Reviews:

Awake up my glory

Choral and organ music by Philip Moore

The Exon Singers ; Matthew Owens ; Jonathan Vaughn

Regent Records REGCD 315



Journal of the Association of Anglican Musicians

May / June 2010

Philip Moore is well known as the Organist and Master of the Music at York Minster from 1983 to 2008; his highly original yet fully accessible music has been performed throughout the world, especially in Anglican circles. This program presents a varied selection of his wide output and offers many helpful ideas for repertory selection.

The composer provided brief notes about all of the pieces included, principally about the time and place for which they were written. The title work, *Awake up my glory* (text: Psalm 57: 9-12), dates from 1994 and was originally written for AAM member Keith Shafer and the Sewanee Church Music Conference. The ambitious organ part, far from a mere accompaniment, will keep a player busy. The 2008 *Salve Regina* and the 2001 *O sacrum convivium* are fine liturgical pieces. The earliest work on the program (1980), *All wisdom cometh from the Lord*, sets verses from Ecclesiasticus and Psalm 119 in an extended work, probably too long for a service anthem, but surely a highlight for a choral concert program.

Two sets of Evening Canticles, the usual *Mag 'n Nunc* and the alternatives *Cantate Domino* and *Deus Misereatur* are exquisite pieces, written for Canterbury Cathedral and Jesus College, Cambridge, respectively.

An anonymous secular text of c.1500, *The Song of the Roses*, celebrates the union of the (supposed) red rose of Lancaster with the white rose of York into the combined Tudor rose. The fascinating texture sets a four-part choir (with *divisi*) against an ATB solo trio, the latter representing the three Roses. Although this was written for a service at York Minster, with its

refrain, "I love, I love and whom love ye?" it would more likely serve as a concert presentation.

The extended (16 minutes) *In Memoriam* for soprano and organ, with text from half a dozen sources, was written as a memorial piece for Duncan Johnston and on commission from the soprano / organ duo of Sally and Robert Munns. Susan Hamilton uses her clear voice in a wide variety of expressions called upon by the changing textual moods. Her phrasing and tone quality are a delight to hear.

The *Three Pieces for Withycombe* were written for Moore's mother, an accomplished pianist, to play as manuals only at her church in Somerset, where "as in so many churches today there was no resident organist". These three short pieces would be useful even for an organist with pedal technique; they have enough technical challenge and musical interest to make them worthy of service use. One other solo, a *Dance-Rondo*, is a delightful and spirited romp, suitable for recital or as a service voluntary. Matthew Owens, Organist and Master of the Choristers at Wells Cathedral, where this recording was made, excels both in these solo works and in the accompaniments.

The Exon Singers, founded in 1966, is a superb chamber choir of 28 singers. They have excellent tone quality and intonation, and they make each work sound as though it had been written expressly for them (although only the *Salve Regina* was). The liner includes, in addition to Moore's notes, full texts, biographies and the specification of the V/88 Harrison & Harrison organ.

Victor Hill Ph.D

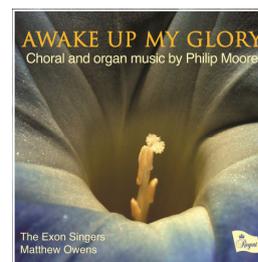
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Organist's Review

August 2010

Having been privileged to review other discs by the Exon Singers, I was delighted to receive this recording. **The choir is renowned for its committed and musicianly singing, and we hear them here in superb form.** It could be that they are simply responding to the glorious music of Philip Moore. Here is the work of a “natural”, unselfconscious composer who seems equally at home with or without words. In his choral music he has the knack of selecting the finest, most inspirational texts which evoke an apposite and telling response from composer and performer alike. In his organ music the lack of textual inspiration in no way diminishes his compositional talents; he achieves the same cohesion and integrity found in his choral writing.

Awake up my glory (Kevin Mayhew) provides an exuberant start to this feast. Using words from Ps. 57 voices and organ capture the declamatory style of the text. *Salve Regina* begins as a chordal dialogue between upper and lower voices. In verse 2 the six-part writing, with its dissonance and harmonic shifts, reflects the gulf between Mary's love and our sinfulness. The text of *O sacrum convivium* has inspired many poignant settings, and this is no exception. The richness of the harmony might lead one to suspect there are more than four parts at work ! All wisdom cometh from the Lord (Cathedral Music Ltd) was composed in 1980 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Lanesborough School which provides the boy choristers for Guildford Cathedral where Philip Moore was at that time Organist & Master of the Choristers. Much of the writing is for unison or single voice-part; a big baritone solo (written for Simon Deller) gives way to a rhythmic section “The fear of the Lord”,

and the anthem closes with a reiteration of the opening material and the superimposition of words from Psalm 119 using a plainsong tone. The *Three Pieces for Withycombe* (Banks) were written for the composer's mother to play at St Nicholas's Church, Withycombe, Somerset. Set for manuals only, these are delightful, contrasting essays that require a good technique. The metaphysical poets have inspired many composers, especially during the last century, and here is a setting of *Thou art my life*, an extract from “Why dost thou shade thy face?” by Francis Quarles. Effective interplay between the sopranos and lower voices underlines each four-word statement (Thou art my life, Thou art my way, My light thou art) and the effect of its absence. A “panic attack” begin at the words “Without that light”. The work ends with a return to the opening material and texture at “Disclose thy sunbeams”. Many of us know the sumptuous Third Service *Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis* in their former ATB version (then styled Second Service). The rescoring for SATB is fortuitous in opening the work to many more choirs. It is cast in *fauxbourdon* structure in which plainsong verses alternate with polyphonic verses based on the plainsong tone. **The full verses should carry a health warning, such is their beauty !** It is available from Oxford University Press and should be on the shopping list of every choir that sings Choral evensong. Also on that list should be the *Dance-Rondo* (SJMP) for organ solo. It doesn't sound easy but it has such foot-tapping vitality that I'm sure it's worth the trouble ! Visit www.sjmp.com. *The Song of the Roses* is set for 4-part choir and ATB trio. Antiphonal writing pervades, and occasionally the solo trio is superimposed on full choir. The longest work on the disc is *In Memoriam* for soprano soloist (Susan Hamilton) and organ. Commissioned by Sally and Robert Munns in 1987, its text is taken from the Burial Service (BCP); I heard a voice; Psalm 84, O how amiable, the hymn; Jesu grant me this, I pray; C L Drawbridge's *The cry of*

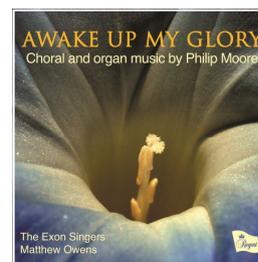
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earth's anguish, Close now thine eyes by Francis Quarles and G H Palmer's beautiful translation from the Salisbury Diurnal *Holy is the true light*. The music is quite haunting, beautiful, bitter, warm, icy, by turn. Word painting is exquisite, and those of us who have lost loved ones will resonate with the pain, sorrow and hope so graphically expressed here. What makes this work come alive for me is the extraordinary skill of soloist Susan Hamilton. Her ability to present different emotions through a change in vocal character is uncanny. The work opens with an almost child-like purity of sound, while at climaxes her voice takes on an operatic quality – and there's a whole gamut of colours in between. What a voice ! And what a work ! Finally the disc ends with choral settings of the *Cantate Domino* and *Deus Misereatur*, the alternative Evensong canticles, commissioned by Jesus College, Cambridge. *Cantate Domino* (Ps. 98) is an energetic romp for choir and organist while *Deus Misereatur* (Ps. 67) is much more contemplative, excepting the "Let the people praise thee" verses.

This selection of Philip Moore's work really is a *tour-de-force* for composer and performer. There's nothing compromising about the writing but **The Exon Singers make seemingly light work of the many challenges presented**. Their vocal agility and choral teamwork are well known, as is their musicality and sensitivity. I thoroughly enjoyed the task of acquainting myself with this composer, having known only his Third Service and *Three Pieces for Withycombe*. Congratulations to all involved in this splendid project.

Andrew Fletcher

Church Music Quarterly

September 2010

Philip Moore's music is of a quality that deserves a survey such as this, **which is sung and accompanied with sensitive expression and accomplishment**. His style is very much of the late twentieth, early twenty-first century English cathedral type, but Moore's voice is individual; though his musical language has emerged from a rich and distinctive tradition, he builds on that tradition rather than aping it. The disc opens with the anthem from which it takes its name. *All wisdom cometh from the Lord*, a piece of nearly ten minutes' duration, has been recorded before and makes an impact within the programme. *Thou art my life*, commissioned by Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, is a haunting piece, while the *Third Service* uses plainsong to create a canticle setting of surprising gentleness. Some organ pieces are included: *Three pieces for Withycombe* for manuals only and an exuberant *Dance-Rondo*. This disc is warmly commended to listeners who enjoy contemporary choral and organ music.

Musicweb International Classical

Reviews

August 2011

Philip Moore served with distinction as Organist and Master of the Music at York Minster from 1983 to 2008. This CD reveals him to be a fine composer also.

Perhaps it's unsurprising that a man steeped in the English cathedral tradition – he served at Canterbury and Guildford cathedrals before

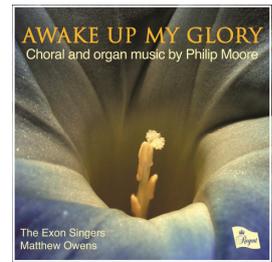
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moving to York – should make such effective settings of the Evening Canticles as are performed here. And how refreshing to find a setting of the too-rarely heard alternative canticles, Psalms 98 and 67. These were composed for Jesus College, Cambridge and it was at Moore’s suggestion that he set these canticles rather than the ‘Mag’ and ‘Nunc’ originally requested. The setting of Psalm 98 is jubilant and strongly rhythmical, culminating in an exuberant doxology, and it features an important organ part. The setting of Psalm 67 mixes passages of more reflective music with joyful sections; here the doxology is more inwardly prayerful in tone.

The standard ‘Mag’ and ‘Nunc’ texts themselves are also impressively set in Moore’s Third Service. These are *alternatim* settings and the polyphonic verses are closely related to the music of the chant sections. The music for both canticles has a timeless evening feel.

In Memoriam is for solo soprano accompanied by organ. In this extended piece Jonathan Vaughn provides a most sensitive accompaniment, as he does in several of the choral pieces, and he gives admirable support to the excellent soloist, Susan Hamilton. Moore has taken texts from a variety of sources, including the Salisbury Diurnal, the Book of Common Prayer and Psalm 84 and has woven them into a seamless whole. I greatly admired Miss Hamilton’s exemplary diction and her clear, focused tone. The nature of much of the music is reflective but one section (8:04 – 10:34), where Moore sets some lines by C L Drawbridge, is much more dramatic. My attention was also drawn to the concluding section (from 13:32), which is a short, ecstatic setting of the text ‘Holy is the true light’, and which closes with soft, radiant

‘Alleluias’, as the work began. *In Memoriam* is an eloquent, impressive piece and its appearance on disc, and in such a fine performance, is to be welcomed.

I should also mention that Jonathan Vaughn has two solo items. *Three Pieces for Withycombe* were written for the composer’s mother to play at her village church. They’re straightforward and nice pieces – no pedal parts – and the third one, ‘Postlude’ is a delight. As its title suggests, *Dance-Rondo* is rooted in dance rhythms. It’s very likeable and Jonathan Vaughn gives an excellent, crisp account of it.

Among the choral items, *Salve Regina* was written for The Exon Singers and it’s for unaccompanied SSATBB choir. Arch-like in form, the quiet opening and ending frame a more intense central section. *O sacrum convivium*, for SATB, is also unaccompanied. It’s a fine little composition, reflective and devotional in tone.

Though it lasts for less than ten minutes *All wisdom cometh from the Lord* is a significant piece. After a vigorous opening the music slows for a bass solo (2:14 – 4:42), beginning at ‘To whom hath the root of wisdom been revealed?’ The solo part contains a particularly magisterial phrase, first heard at the words ‘the Lord sitting upon his throne’, and repeated to different words a few moments later. The soloist, Christopher Sheldrake, sings with feeling. However, as I’ve noted on some other discs from Wells, he has too wide a vibrato for my taste and sometimes seems to push the tone. After the bass solo the vigorous opening music returns before the extended and rather beautiful closing section (from 6:04),

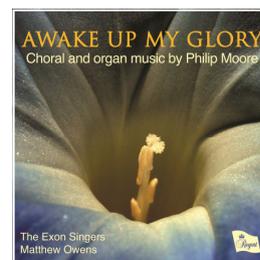
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beginning at 'Teach me thy statutes'. This tranquil passage is dominated by a plainsong melody in the soprano line.

All wisdom cometh from the Lord is an impressive piece but so too are the others in this collection. This is music that reflects a lifetime's experience of writing and performing music for voices and organ. The craftsmanship seems to me to be fastidious and the choice of texts is discerning and these texts frequently inspire a very eloquent musical response. **Impressive too are the performances, with Matthew Owens once again showing what a fine choral trainer he is and drawing out committed singing from his excellent choir.** All this music was new to me – most of the works are here recorded for the first time - but I enjoyed it very much. **Philip Moore's expertly written and very attractive music has been well served on this very welcome disc.**

John Quinn