



Hoylake Choral Society

Musical Director: Finlay Gordon

Serenade to Music

by Vaughan Williams

Carols by Rutter, Gordon, Howells & Warlock

Friday 28 November 2025

7.30 pm

St Hildeburgh's Church

Stanley Road, Hoylake, CH47 1HL

www.hoylakechoralsociety.org

Registered Charity No:243442

Do you enjoy singing?

Why not come and join us for a couple of taster sessions next January.

We meet at Hope Church Hall, by Hoylake Station, CH47 4AA,
on Wednesday evenings from
7.30 – 9.15 pm.

No Auditions!

Details about start dates will be published on
our website:

www.hoylakechoralsociety.org

or by emailing:

HoylakeChoral@outlook.com

Welcome

Hoylake Choral Society is delighted to welcome you to our winter concert, held in Hoylake's parish church.

This evening we present Vaughan Williams' 'Serenade to Music' and some less well-known Christmas Carols.

There will be an interval of about 20 minutes when refreshments will be served in the Church Hall accessed from the back of the church. We hope, if you have not already bought raffle tickets, you will do so on your way through. The actual raffle will be held off stage during the second half of the programme, and the winning prizes will be available to collect at the end of the evening

Hoylake Choral Society has been performing a wide range of music, from the classical choral repertoire to contemporary compositions since 1947.

We hope you enjoy the programme.

Programme

1. I wonder as I wander, trad American collected J.J. Niles (1892–1980)
2. Serenade to Music, Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872 – 1958)
3. What Sweeter Music, John Rutter (b. 1945)
4. A Boy was Born, Finlay Gordon (b. 1999)
5. How Shall I Sing that Majesty, Ken Naylor (1931 – 1991), arr. Finlay Gordon

Interval—please join us for refreshments in the Church Hall

6. Bethlehem Down, Peter Warlock (1894 – 1930)
7. A Great and Mighty Wonder, Es ist ein Ros entsprungen – Anon. 16th century. Harm. Michael Praetorius (1571 – 1621)
8. Past Three o’Clock – Finlay Gordon (b. 1999)
9. Here is the Little Door – Herbert Howells (1892 – 1983)
10. *Organ Interlude* The Holy Boy, John Ireland
11. A New Year Carol, Benjamin Britten (1913 – 1976)
12. *Poem* The Oxen, Thomas Hardy (1840 – 1928)
13. Legend (The Crown of Roses) Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840 – 1893)
14. Jesus Child, John Rutter (b. 1945)

Serenade to Music

From ethnomusicologist John Blacking's concise definition of music as 'humanly organised sound', or the modern aphorism that music is the universal language, a great deal has been written about the importance and meaning of music in our lives. One of the privileges of making music is the opportunity to elevate the great texts of the English language, from poetry to drama and the ancient texts of the Church. Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Serenade to Music*, his great concert work in the style of a tone poem, stands as one of the finest examples of the principle that text coupled with music leads to something greater than the sum of its parts. With lyrics taken from *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare, *Serenade to Music* is a discussion of music, and of the music of the spheres, drawing parallels between the human need to make music, and the purity and constancy of the celestial bodies. In this way, sweeping violin lines are later mirrored by soprano voices, notably in the phrase which brings *Serenade to Music* together:

"Here we sit and let the sounds of music creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night become the touches of sweet harmony"

In the first half of tonight's concert, *Serenade to Music* is placed next to carols which lead us from the theme of the beauty of music, towards the devotional purpose of music which brings us together at Christmas. John Rutter's *What Sweeter Music* again speaks of the heavenly music felt in our souls, contrasted with the carols we bring before Jesus at Christmastime, while my newest carol *A Boy was Born* introduces the Christmas story which will be explored more thoroughly in our second half tonight.

Beginning with Peter Warlock's tender and tragic *Bethlehem Down*, the second half of our concert views the birth of Jesus from multiple different perspectives, from the wise men in Howells' *Here is the Little Door*, and taking in a modern perspective through Hardy's moving poem *The Oxen*. However, the piece that greets us when we arrive at the manger does not depict Jesus as He lay there, but a vision of His future, and the sacrifice he was destined to make, as told in Tchaikovsky's *Legend*, known in English as *The Crown of Roses*. Rutter's cheerful and optimistic *Jesus Child* draws tonight's concert to a close with a vision of hope, and a reminder of why we all gather together at Christmas to celebrate this great mystery.

Musical Director – Finlay Gordon



Finlay Gordon was born and raised on the Wirral, and now works across the Northwest as a countertenor, amateur and teacher.

Studying at Durham University, Finlay was Director of Music of the Choir of Grey College and sang with Hatfield College Choir. Here, he studied conducting with Peter Foggitt and James Weeks, and singing with Matthew Thomas Morgan, graduating with First Class Honours in 2020.

Finlay spent four years at Liverpool Cathedral, firstly as a Choral Scholar, and then as a Lay Clerk, singing five services a week with the cathedral choir. As Assistant Outreach Lead at the cathedral, he also worked to deliver a programme of choral music to primary schools across the Diocese of Liverpool and ran a children's choir – Junior Choir Sefton – based in Formby.

When not making music, Finlay is a PhD candidate at Liverpool John Moore's University, researching the impact of choral music on young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In his free time, he sings with the Liverpool Bach Collective, composes music he can't wait to make HCS perform in due time, and battles with his Irish Wolfhound on their walks.

Finlay was appointed Musical Director of Hoylake Choral Society in September 2024 and looks forward to his third concert tonight.

Accompanist– Richard Lea

Richard Lea was born in Wigan, was Organist at St Oswald's, Ashton in Makerfield, Organ Scholar and then Organist at Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral, working with Noel Rawsthorne, Philip Duffy and Terence Duffy, Mervyn Cousins, Keith Orrell, Timothy Noon and Christopher McElroy.

After two years as Organist at Buckfast Abbey, Devon, he returned to the Cathedral. He has made numerous broadcasts, CDs and a DVD, receiving excellent reviews. He has conducted numerous choirs, including Wigan Choral Society, The Brix Singers and Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral Cantata Choir.

Rehearsal Accompanist– Victoria Wells

Victoria is a much-valued accompanist to the choir and has been with us for many years. She has been an accompanist to several other local organisations including Liverpool Philharmonic Choir. Victoria has also taught at Liverpool University, Huyton College and Birkenhead Sixth Form College and currently teaches the piano.

Members of Hoylake Choral Society singing tonight are:

Sopranos

Dianne Brennan, Lynn Fraser, Jane Kearley, Mary Kilcoyne,
Sue McShane, Helen Merritt, Heather Morgan, Christine Potts,
Tina Renshaw, Marjorie Shreffin, Debbie Simnor,
Stephanie Sanderson, Jean Taylor

Altos

Helen Armitage, Mary Ann Aust, Jean Bedford,
Sue Carver, Louise Docherty, Caitlin Edwards, Margaret Gordon,
Gail Grey, Josephine Hammesley, Fiona Philpott, Margaret Reid,
Sylvia Tebb, Gill Wright

Tenors

Helen Armstrong, Mary Eaton, Phil Moss, Richard Pleass,
Maria Setz, Stan van den Berg

Basses

Dave Cashman, Colin Hill, Steve Longmore, Richard Merritt, Phil Shead,
Peter Shennan, John Turner

Future Concerts

St Hildeburgh's is holding its regular Christmas Tree Festival on Saturday, 6th December and we shall be singing carols at 2 o'clock.

Our summer concert will be on Saturday, 16th May 2026, again at St Hildeburgh's, when we will be performing Brahms' *A German Requiem* and Durufle's *Quatre Motets sur des themes gregoriens*.

Hoylake Choral Society
Registered Charity No 243442