

## **'SWORD IN THE SOUL' by Francis Grier** *Seven short films from King's College Chapel, Cambridge*

**Philharmonia Voices will be marking the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the completion of King's College Chapel, Cambridge with a specially created film project.**

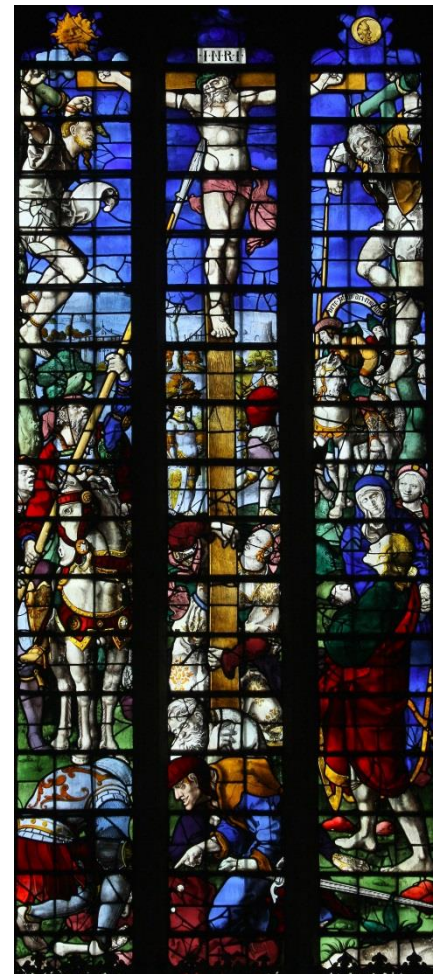
Over the course of Holy Week 2015, seven short films will be released online, juxtaposing the artistry of the Chapel's stained glass windows with the compelling music of contemporary composer and King's alumnus Francis Grier (b.1955). The films will feature Philharmonia Voices in a specially recorded performance of Grier's *The Sword in the Soul*, a seven-movement Passiontide sequence for choir, organ and virtuoso cello solo, filmed for the project in King's College Chapel itself.

Interwoven with the footage of the Grier performance, and using it as a driving narrative force, the films explore the Passion story and other relevant biblical episodes as depicted in the famous stained glass windows. In particular the films focus on the majestic sequence of windows at the East end of the Chapel, not least the vast East window itself, which depicts with thrilling dramatic power a succession of scenes including Christ before Pilate, Christ carrying the cross, his nailing to the cross, the crucifixion on Golgotha, and finally the deposition from the cross. By exploring the windows in high resolution detail, the films will give viewers a fully immersive experience in the extraordinary detail of the stained glass in a way that is almost impossible for anyone viewing the windows with the naked eye from the floor of the Chapel.

The seven films each last between two and five minutes, each one exploring a different aspect or episode of the Holy Week narrative. The films will be released one by one on the King's College website during the course of Holy Week in 2015, starting on Palm Sunday, 29 April and culminating on Holy Saturday, 4 April. The films will thus play an active part in the Chapel's Passiontide observance in 2015 for a worldwide audience, while also creating a permanent legacy for continued viewing online. The project will form part of the 'Chapel 500<sup>th</sup>' programme of events being organised by King's College to celebrate the quincentenary:

<http://www.kings.cam.ac.uk/chapel/500/>

Grier's *Sword in the Soul* was originally written in 1991 for a BBC Radio 4 broadcast, but it has not yet been commercially recorded. The imagery of the work's sung texts, drawn from sources as diverse as the Orthodox liturgy and a 14<sup>th</sup>-century lyric poem, is particularly striking, making its 7-movement structure particularly well-suited to this visual treatment as a succession of contrasting video tableaux. As a BBC Radio 4 commission for Passiontide broadcast, *Sword in the Soul* was deliberately written by Grier in his most accessible and ravishing style, and this project will build on the work's original aims by again 'broadcasting' it to a wide audience in Passiontide via the online release of the videos over Holy Week.



Francis Grier, a former Organ Scholar of King's College, is one of the UK's most distinguished choral and liturgical composers. The performance on the films also features David Goode, another former Organ Scholar, as organist, and Aidan Oliver, a former Choral Scholar as conductor. Sarah Suckling, a former Instrumental Scholar of Cambridge University, plays the virtuosic cello solo part which runs throughout the work.

## NOTES TO EDITORS

### *The composer, performers and film-makers*

In the early part of his life, **Francis Grier** was steeped in the tradition of church music. He was a chorister at St George's, Windsor, a music scholar at Eton College, organ scholar at King's College, Cambridge, then organist at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford. He now divides his time between composition and chamber music (as a pianist), and psychoanalysis.

*Sword in the Soul* is one of many religious compositions. In 2006 his *Passion*, commissioned by the BBC and VocalEssence in Minneapolis was described by the Independent as "a humdinger of a new work. ... To say "impact", however, would be to understate...The Passion of Jesus of Nazareth is a work of vital attack, shivering beauty and compelling power." The Minneapolis Star Tribune described it as "a modern masterpiece".

Recent works for major centres of church music include *Missa Spiritus Sanctus* (2010) and *Missa Brevis* (2011) for St Paul's Cathedral, the latter winning a British Composer Award; *Missa Aedes Christi* (2012) for Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, also danced by the Ballet Rambert Dance School; *...lit by holy fire* (2014), a setting of the Vespers for the choir of King's College, Cambridge.

**Philharmonia Voices** was formed by Aidan Oliver in 2004 to collaborate with the Philharmonia Orchestra on some of its most ambitious projects. Since then the choir has established itself as one of the most exciting professional choruses in London, attracting consistently high praise from the critics for its performances with conductors including Esa-Pekka Salonen, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Lorin Maazel, Richard Hickox and John Wilson.

Under the Philharmonia's principal conductor, Esa-Pekka Salonen, the choir has enjoyed several notable triumphs, particularly in 20<sup>th</sup>-century repertoire. These have included performances of Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*; Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder*, and a highly acclaimed performance of Dallapiccola's neglected one-act opera *Il Prigioniero*. In the 2014-15 season the choir has had a prominent role in the orchestra's *City of Light: Paris 1900-1950* series, including a semi-staged performance of Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges* ("Still, it was the Philharmonia Voices, singing with delicate, haunting beauty, that etched the deepest mark" – Financial Times). Next year they will also feature prominently in the Philharmonia's major Stravinsky series, *Myths and Rituals*, as well as embarking for the first time on a series of performances as a chamber choir in their own right. <http://www.philharmoniavoices.org/>

As well as Director of Philharmonia Voices, **Aidan Oliver** is also Director of Music at St Margaret's Church, Westminster (the Parliamentary Church) and an Associate Conductor of the St Endellion Festival in Cornwall. He assists regularly on the music staff at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and his engagements as guest chorus master have included numerous projects with the BBC Symphony Chorus, BBC Singers and English National Opera. He is also the Director of Dulwich Choral Society.

For the Philharmonia Orchestra, Aidan has prepared choruses for nearly 50 major performances including Mahler's *Symphony of a Thousand*, Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette*, Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky* and *Ivan the Terrible*, Britten's *Death in Venice* and premières of works by Joby Talbot and Magnus Lindberg. He has acted as Assistant Conductor to Esa-Pekka Salonen on tours to the US, Russia and Europe and was invited by Lorin Maazel to direct the chamber orchestra in performances of Britten's *War Requiem* in London and Hong Kong. For the St Endellion Festival, Aidan has conducted works including Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 5*, Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder* and Stravinsky's *Soldier's Tale* with Rory Kinnear, narrator.

[cont.]

Aidan Oliver began his musical career as a chorister at Westminster Cathedral, later studying at Eton College and at King's College Cambridge. After graduating with a double First in Classics, he pursued further studies at Harvard University, the National Opera Studio and King's College London.

[www.aidanoliver.co.uk](http://www.aidanoliver.co.uk)

**David Goode** is Organist at Eton College, combining this post with a flourishing performing career.

A music scholar at Eton, and organ scholar at King's College, Cambridge, he was Sub-Organist at Christ Church, Oxford from 1996-2001 and won prizes at the 1997 St. Alban's and 1998 Calgary Competitions. From 2003-5 he was Organist-in-Residence at First Congregational Church, home to the world's largest church organ.

He has played all over the world, with a regular presence at the Proms. The latest performance in his partnership with the trumpeter Alison Balsom was the reopening concert of the RFH organ. *The Times* described his 2013 Bach disc thus: 'One of Britain's finest organists puts the 1714 organ in Freiberg Cathedral through its paces .... An exemplary introduction'; he is now recording the complete works for Signum Records. He is also known for his Reger recordings, and his performances of new music.

He has also recently developed a profile as a composer.

<http://www.goodeorganist.org/>

**Sarah Suckling (cello)** read music at Selwyn College, Cambridge where she was an Instrumental Scholar and continued her postgraduate studies at the Royal College of Music with the assistance of a generous bursary from the Countess of Munster Musical Fund. In 1998, Sarah won the prestigious Muriel Taylor Cello Competition.

Sarah enjoys performing as a soloist and chamber musician and has given concerts around the UK and abroad including tours of British Embassies in the Far East, Australia and Europe. Sarah has had several works written for her and her special interest in playing contemporary music led to a solo recital in the Park Lane Group series at the Purcell Room, as well as regular live broadcasts on Radio 3 from the Proms Chamber series. Sarah also freelances with several orchestras including the City of London Sinfonia and the Philharmonia Orchestra.

### **Polyphonic Films Ltd**

Polyphonic makes film and television about and inspired by classical music. Its debut *The Full Monteverdi* (2007) was critically acclaimed - "Excellent" (The Times) - while its sumptuous series *Music Room* (Sky Arts) was dubbed "exceptionally classy" (Radio Times). In 2012 Polyphonic produced the screen incarnation of *How Like An Angel* for The Space, which went on to premiere at the Lincoln Centre in the US and win Best Camera Rework at Dance Screen 2014. In addition to its own projects, Polyphonic continues to make music videos and documentaries with some of the world's leading classical musicians, including Jonas Kauffman, Renée Fleming, Daniel Barenboim, I Fagiolini and The Gewandhaus Orchestra, Leipzig.

[www.polyphonicfilms.com](http://www.polyphonicfilms.com)

### **For further details, contact:**

Aidan Oliver,  
Director of Music, St Margaret's Church  
The Chapter Office  
21 Dean's Yard  
Westminster Abbey  
London SW1 3PA

+44 (0)7977 137298

Email: [aidan.oliver@westminster-abbey.org](mailto:aidan.oliver@westminster-abbey.org)

[www.aidanoliver.co.uk](http://www.aidanoliver.co.uk)

