

## **Magnificat**

**Gerald Finzi (1901 - 1956)**

A series of tragedies profoundly affected Finzi in his early years. His father died just before his eighth birthday, and by the time he was eighteen he had lost his three elder brothers and his much-loved music teacher, killed in action. This dreadful sequence of events, and the appalling losses of the First World War that formed the backdrop to his adolescence, gave Finzi an acute awareness of the impermanence of life, confirmed with grim finality when at the age of fifty he discovered that he was dying of leukaemia. These experiences to a large extent account for the hint of melancholy underlying much of his music.

Finzi's music springs from his love of literature and the English countryside - the same sources that inspired Elgar and Vaughan Williams. Like them he found writing vocal music particularly satisfying. In fact, about two-thirds of his entire output is either for chorus or solo voice. His music is immediately recognisable by its yearning melodies and wistful harmonies, and his instinctive feeling for the English language is exceptional, the natural speech-rhythms and cadences of his musical lines complementing perfectly each chosen text.

The *Magnificat* opens with an imposing organ introduction. It is an expansive piece with a bright, festive character, and is mainly in eight parts. The final verse moves straight into the 'Amen' without a Gloria, which is probably why Finzi did not intend it for liturgical use. However, the music is of such fine quality that it appears in the repertoire of a number of choirs, usually paired with the Holst Nunc Dimittis. It bears the dedication '*Written for Iva Dee Hiatt and Robert Beckwith and the choirs of Smith and Amherst Colleges, Massachusetts. Christmas 1952*' and was originally written with an organ accompaniment, the orchestral version following later.

*programme notes by John Bawden*

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