

Welcome, Sweet and Sacred Feast

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.

Welcome, Sweet and Sacred Feast is the third and longest of Finzi's three anthems, Opus 27 (the other two being *My Lovely One* and *God Is Gone Up*). It was composed in 1953 at the invitation of the BBC Religious Broadcasting Department, and broadcast from St Michael's, Cornhill, in October that year, with George Thalben Ball and the BBC Singers. The text is from 'The Holy Communion', by the Welsh metaphysical poet Henry Vaughan (1622 – 1695).

All the familiar Finzi fingerprints are apparent; his exceptional sensitivity to the rhythms and cadences of the English language, reflecting and enhancing the ebb and flow of Vaughan's inspired verse; the soaring, lyrical melodies and wistful harmonies; the finely judged unaccompanied sections, used with telling effect. This is Finzi at his most relaxed, the music flowing with a natural ease and assurance.

programme notes by John Bawden

To those using these notes

You are more than welcome to use all or part of these notes for your choral society or church programme, or for educational purposes. Please would you ensure that my authorship is attributed, and would you also kindly advise me by e-mail - info@directoryofchoralmusic.co.uk. If you wish to use these notes for commercial reproduction, e.g. a CD or DVD liner, please contact me first. Thank you.