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CLASSICS

Gesangbuch

Choral Works by Edward Cowie

BBC Singers, Simon Joly, Stephen Cleobury
Endymion
Stephen Preston



EDWARD COWIE GESANGBUCH

- | | | |
|----------------------------|--|---------|
| 1 | Bell Bird Motet (2011) BBC Singers Stephen Cleobury <i>conductor</i> | [8.12] |
| 2 | The Soft Complaining Flute (2003) BBC Singers Stephen Preston <i>baroque flute</i> Stephen Cleobury <i>conductor</i> | [6.44] |
| Gesangbuch (1975-6) | | |
| 3 | Herbstlich - Eaves Wood | [10.03] |
| 4 | Winterlied - Martinmere | [10.11] |
| 5 | Habichtswald - Spring | [8.16] |
| 6 | Stimmungsbild - Hest Bank BBC Singers Endymion Simon Joly <i>conductor</i> | [13.33] |
| 7 | Lyre Bird Motet (2002) BBC Singers Stephen Cleobury <i>conductor</i> | [7.14] |
| | Total timings: | [64.40] |

BBC SINGERS
STEPHEN CLEOBURY, SIMON JOLY
ENDYMION
STEPHEN PRESTON

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NOTES ON THE WORKS

Bell Bird Motet *for chamber choir, a cappella. 2011*

In 2011, Cowie founded and directed the first Earth Music Festival in Bristol – an event celebrating composers, visual artists, filmmakers and writers' responses to the natural and living world. BBC Radio 3 commissioned a new work for the festival and Cowie's response was to compose a companion-piece to the earlier *Lyre Bird Motet* – this time inspired by dawn and not dusk. The bell bird is a thrush-like Australian bird of dense wooded bush, often close to water. The birds congregate and nest in large groups, the males engaging in a vibrant and bell-like heterophony mostly at dawn when their songs rise to a climactic point. Like its companion piece, the *Lyre Bird*, it is the female voices that invoke the bell-chants of the birds towards the end of the piece. It opens, however, with translations of choruses of several species of Australian frogs.



Bell Miner Motet. Su. Study. November, 2010. Edward Cowie.

The Soft Complaining Flute
for 6 sopranos and baroque flute. 2003

With the same title as a movement from Handel's *Ode to St Cecilia*, Cowie intentionally casts this work in the shadows of the late Baroque. It is also inspired by the virtuosity and innovative technical playing of Stephen Preston, whose *ecosonic techniques* (special timbral and pitch manipulation through a combination of elaborate cross-fingering and lip-shape) appear several times in this short piece – especially in a cadenza close to the end of the work. The prevailing mood of the piece is a flux between sadness and veiled exultation.

Gesangbuch
for mixed chorus and 13 instruments. 1975-76

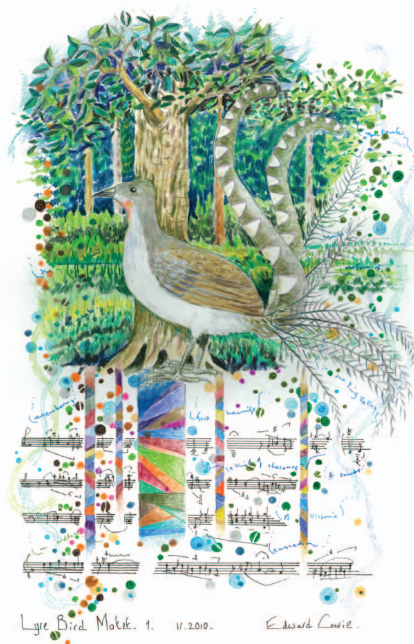
This large-scale work was commissioned by the Brighton Festival and was premiered by the BBC Singers and the Brighton Festival Ensemble. It was to be the first of many collaborations with the BBC Singers, marking the start of an involvement that has continued from 1975 to the present day. (Cowie was appointed their first Associate Composer from 2002–5.) Cast in four choral movements, each accompanied by different configurations of winds, strings,



solo horn and percussion (including harp, piano and celeste), two of the movements feature either the female or male vocal groups, and the others a full chorus of 24 voices.

Gesangbuch is dedicated to Michael Tippett who at that time was a close friend and mentor to Edward Cowie. The title derives from Goethe, literally meaning, 'a book of songs'. It is also a work that celebrates *The Four Seasons* with perhaps more than a hint of Vivaldi's focus on textures and pulsating rhythms.

Beginning in the autumn, Cowie transports the listener into a sound-world of bright 'hot' colours, conjuring with the play of light on autumn leaves; the gentle engulfment of mists and light rain. This, like the remaining movements, is evoked by wordless sounds from the choir, except for a few descriptive elements of text relating to landscape and colour and a direct quotation in German from Goethe, and at the close of the movement, a setting in four parts of *poeme d'Automne* of Baudelaire. The movements that follow form a procession of ever-changing textures and 'moods', none more elegiac and scintillating than the close of the work in *Stimmungsbild*, where a moonrise over the estuarine sand banks of Morecambe Bay in Lancashire drifts and ebbs through several tonal regions – ending on a rapturous benediction in F-sharp major.



Lyre Bird Motet for chamber choir, a cappella. 2002

The *Lyre Bird Motet* has proved to be a favourite with the BBC Singers and audiences alike. Cowie spent 12 years living and working in Australia, often spending days at a time exploring wild bush country on his own. On one of these trips, he sat on the edge of a cliff overlooking the King Valley in Victoria. It was evening time, with wreaths of blue/purple bush-fire smoke in the distance. Just as the light finally dipped towards an inky darkness, several male lyrebirds began to sing in a series of interlocking but combative ensemble performances. Their songs – a combination of beautiful flute-like arabesques and clicks and hisses – captivated Cowie, and it is towards that ravishing avian chorus that the work moves. Its structure also has a close relationship with the chaconne, opening with a series of chords which phase between G minor and major, and which permeate the flow of the music from beginning to end. The closing two minutes feature the solo work of the sopranos, each intoning different versions of lyrebird song as the light fades and closing with the fitting words – *goodnight!*

In all of the works on this CD, Cowie uses phonetic sounds of his own invention, together with fragments of texts taken from his own preparatory sketchbooks. The latter is especially true of both the *Lyre Bird Motet* and the *Bell Bird Motet*.

In *Gesangbuch*, Cowie makes brief selective quotes from Goethe and Baudelaire, and in the final movement the choir sing the Latin names of many species of wading birds. Extracts from Dryden's poem 'The Soft Complaining Flute' are sung by the sopranos, though what texts there are become layered and phased, and thus not a normal flow of sung text. Cowie sees phonetics, words and texts as materials that inform the singers of what the music is doing. For example, in all of the works, singers find themselves singing the names of colours, or short verbal descriptions of landscape features. The effect that Cowie seeks is that words become like any other acoustic signals, and that the absorption of text and non-text is designed simply to enrich the sensations within the listener's ears.

Notes provided by the composer

EDWARD COWIE

Edward Cowie was born in Birmingham in 1943, and first came to international prominence with his BBC Prom commission, *Leviathan* in 1975. Since that time his music has been recorded, performed and featured in major festivals all over the world. He studied with Goehr and Lutostawski. First trained as a physicist, but also studying painting at The Slade, his career parallels and fuses the arts with the sciences. His visual work has been exhibited worldwide, and he has made several television films, commissioned work for radio, and worked as a conductor with orchestras and ensembles in Germany, the UK and Australia. His music has often been described as 'inter-sensual' meaning that the listening experience is connected to visualisation. He intends his music to invite, invoke and impress the listener with 'a sense of place and a place for all of the senses'.

Edward Cowie is internationally renowned as a visual artist, his paintings and drawings having been exhibited all over the world where they can be seen in public and private collections. In the past decade, Cowie has employed *acts of drawing* (what he calls 'drawing towards music' as an essential part

of the building process that leads towards the music. The illustrations here are taken from sketchbooks relating to the works on disc, and form a second-stage process of composition, the first being 'field-work' and the third stage being the compositional work itself.

www.edward-cowie.com



BBC SINGERS

Sopranos

Jennifer Adams-Barbaro
Margaret Feaviour
Carolyn Foulkes *
Micaela Haslam
Eleanor Meynell *
Elizabeth Poole
Alison Smart †
Emma Tring †

Altos

Lynette Alcántara †
Margaret Cameron †
Jacqueline Fox †
Judith Harris *
Rebecca Lodge *
Ksynia Loeffler †
Siân Menna *
Deborah Miles-Johnson
Cherith Millburn-Fryer †
Alison Place *
Penny Vickers *

Tenors

Christopher Bowen †
Jon English *
Edward Goater †
Stephen Jeffes †
Robert Johnston
Ian Kennedy *
Vernon Kirk *
Neil MacKenzie †
Andrew Murgatroyd
David Roy *

Basses

Jeremy Birchall *
Simon Birchall *
Michael Bundy †
Stephen Charlesworth
Charles Gibbs †
Jamie W Hall †
Stuart MacIntyre *
Paul Parfitt *
Adrian Peacock †
Edward Price

* = 2003 recording only † = 2012 recording only



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Chief Conductor David Hill Principal Guest Conductors

Paul Brough and Bob Chilcott

Conductor Laureate Stephen Cleobury

The BBC Singers hold a unique position in British musical life. Performing everything from Byrd to Birtwistle, Tallis to Takemitsu, their versatility is second to none. The choir's unrivalled expertise in performing the best of contemporary music has brought about creative relationships with some of the most important composers and conductors of the 20th and 21st centuries, including Poulenc, Britten, Sir Harrison Birtwistle and Sir Peter Maxwell Davies.

The BBC Singers perform all over the UK and abroad, working regularly with the BBC's own orchestras as well as a number of period-instrument and contemporary music ensembles, and they play an important role in the BBC Proms each year. The ensemble performs regularly in St Paul's Knightsbridge, St Giles' Cripplegate and Milton Court in London.

The BBC Singers give frequent performances with Chief Conductor David Hill, Principal Guest conductors Paul Brough and Bob Chilcott as well as Conductor Laureate Stephen Cleobury.

The group works closely with composer Gabriel Jackson, their Associate Composer from January 2010 to 2013, and have given several world premieres of his works.

With nearly all concerts broadcast on BBC Radio 3, the BBC Singers have the highest broadcast profile of any choir.

This world-class ensemble is committed to sharing its enthusiasm and creative expertise through its nationwide outreach programme. This includes frequent collaborations with schoolchildren, youth choirs and the amateur choral community, as well as with the professional composers, singers and conductors of tomorrow. Regular events include a series of Come and Sing days open to amateur singers.

To find out where you can see the BBC Singers live and for tickets, visit bbc.co.uk/bbcsingers. You can also sign up for our e-newsletter on our homepage.

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STEPHEN CLEOBURY

Stephen Cleobury has since 1982 been associated with one of the world's most famous choirs, that of King's College, Cambridge. His work at King's has brought him into fruitful relationships with many leading orchestras and soloists, among them the Academy of Ancient Music, the Britten Sinfonia and the Philharmonia. From 1983 to 2009 he was Conductor of the Cambridge University Musical Society, a role in which he has not only conducted many orchestral works, but most of the major works for chorus and orchestra.

Between 1995 and 2007 he was Chief Conductor of the BBC Singers and since then has been Conductor Laureate. With the Singers he relished the opportunity to showcase challenging contemporary music and gave a number of important premieres, including Giles Swayne's *Havoc*, Edward Cowie's *Gaia*, and Francis Grier's *Passion*, all these with the distinguished ensemble, Endymion. His many recordings with the Singers include albums of Tippett, Richard Strauss and Bach.

At King's, he has sought to maintain and enhance the reputation of the renowned

Choir, broadening the daily service repertoire, commissioning new music from leading composers, and developing its activities in broadcasting, recording and touring. He has conceived and introduced the highly successful annual festival, Easter at King's, from which the BBC regularly broadcasts, as well as a series of high-profile performances throughout the year, Concerts at King's.



© Gerald Place

As a choral clinician and workshop leader Stephen Cleobury has worked with choirs from all over the world, either welcoming them to Cambridge or visiting their country, often as a judge in a choral competition. Performances as an organ recitalist also find him travelling the world. His work as an arranger of choral music is well known, and includes carols, folksongs and descants. Most recently his music has been published by Edition Peters.

www.stephencleobury.com

SIMON JOLY

Simon Joly was Associate Conductor of the BBC Singers from 1981 to 1988 and their Principal Conductor from 1989 to 1995. He conducted an enormous repertoire with them, specialising in contemporary repertoire. He conducted premieres of works by Luciano Berio, John Tavener, Peter Maxwell Davies, David Bedford, and Oliver Knussen among many others. Performances with the BBC Singers at the Proms included Stravinsky's *Les Noces*, Steve Reich's *The Desert Music* and Giles Swayne's *Cry*; other performances included Brahms' *Fest und Gedenksprüche*, Schoenberg's *Friede auf Erden* and Richard Strauss's *Der Abend*.

Other major 20th-century works performed include Messiaen's *Cinq Rechants*, Birtwistle's *...agm...* and Henze's *The Raft of the Medusa* with the BBC Singers and BBC Symphony Orchestra. He conducted Berio's *Coro* with the BBC Singers and London Sinfonietta at La Scala, Milan in 1996. Concert performances with the BBC Singers included concerts at the Aldeburgh Festival, as well as Cologne, Frankfurt, Helsinki and Warsaw. Simon Joly



conducted many premieres, including Iannis Xenakis's *Sea Nymphs*, written for the BBC Singers' 70th anniversary concert in September 1994. His recordings with the BBC Singers include a disc for Collins Classics of Sir Peter Maxwell Davies' choral works, IKONS, a CD of Sir John Tavener's choral works, and he has recorded both of Bantock's Choral Symphonies with the BBC Singers.

He has conducted BBC performances of several operatic rarities, including Max Brand's *Maschinist Hopkins* and Weber's early work *Peter Schmall*.

ENDYMION

Stacey Dixon *cor anglais, oboe*
Barnaby Robson *clarinet*
Tim Jackson *horn*
Simon Limbrick *percussion*
Helen Tunstall *harp*
Stephen Guttman *celesta*
Alastair Ross *harpichord*
Stephen Betteridge *piano*
Catherine Manson *violin*
Asdis Valdimarsdottir *viola*
Robert Bailly *cello*
Stephen Williams *double Bass*

"The brilliant *Endymion*" (Sunday Times) delivers world-class performances of chamber music throughout London, the UK and abroad. They perform regularly at venues including Wigmore Hall, Southbank Centre, the BBC Proms, and the Cheltenham and Spitalfields Festivals. They have toured in Austria, Ireland, Mexico, Spain, Finland and Italy and for many years were resident at Blackheath Concert Halls. In 2009 they celebrated their 30th birthday with 20 new commissions, education projects and 13 concerts in four days at Kings Place. They have made many recordings and their latest disc, *Sound Census*, was released in March 2010. 2011 featured a major collaboration with EXAUDI, a three-day festival of chamber music by Shostakovich and Schnittke at Kings Place and the UK premiere of Elliott Carter's *Clarinet Quintet*.

Find out more about *Endymion* at
www.endymion.org.uk

STEPHEN PRESTON

Stephen Preston is one of the leading musicians in the pioneering development of early music performance in the UK and Europe, and one of its most acclaimed figures. He established a worldwide reputation for his groundbreaking solo and ensemble performances and recordings on historical flutes.

In 2012 Stephen formed Trio Aporia with innovative musicians Jane Chapman (harpichord) and Richard Boothby (viola da gamba), dedicated to the unbounded exploration of 'historical' instruments in the context of 21st-century music-making through the creation of a new and experimental repertoire. He is also exploring a contemporary incarnation of the one-keyed flute completely developed and completely redesigned by Canadian maker Jean-François Beaudin. Edward Cowie is one of the first composers to contribute to Trio Aporia's unfolding project.

2004 saw the completion of Preston's PhD research project into birdsong as a model for new techniques and improvisation with the baroque flute, which he undertook with Edward Cowie. This led to his developing *Ecosonics* – an



approach to improvisation based on birdsong and biophonic communication – and the formation of the Ecosonic Ensemble which, with cellist/composer Thomas Gardner became the electro-acoustic collective, Automatic Writing Circle.

For many years prior to this Stephen's flute-playing career took a background role while he pursued a passionate interest in dance and choreography. During this period he formed two dance companies, the first to explore historical dance and the second to investigate the historical and contemporary dancing body. Stephen's contributions to flute playing were recognized in 2006 with a Lifetime Achievement Award bestowed on him by America's National Flute Association. He teaches at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester and Trinity Laban College of Music & Dance, London.

www.trioaporia.com
www.stephenpreston-ecosonics.com
www.automaticwritingcircle.org.uk



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Lyrebird Motet. 2002. Published by United Music Publishers.
Bell Bird Motet. 2011. Published by United Music Publishers.

Bell Bird Motet, *The Soft Complaining Flute* & *Lyrebird Motet* recorded in Studio 1, BBC Maida Vale, on 13 January 2012.

Gesangbuch recorded in Phoenix Sound, Wembley, on 6 June 2003.

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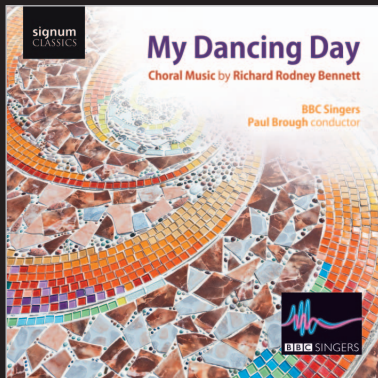


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EDWARD COWIE GESANGBUCH

1 **Bell Bird Motet (2011)** [8.12]

BBC Singers
Stephen Cleobury *conductor*

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Stephen Cleobury *conductor*

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