

Mátyás Seiber (1905-1960)

Choral Music *a cappella*

Choir of the 21st Century conducted by Howard Williams

Yugoslav Folk Songs (SATB, 1942)

- | | | |
|-----|------------------------------|------|
| [1] | 1. The Unfaithful Lover | 1:01 |
| [2] | 2. Handsome Mirko | 0:59 |
| [3] | 2a. Eighteen Shining Buttons | 1:36 |
| [4] | 3. Heaven Above | 2:15 |
| [5] | 4. Hussars | 0:42 |
| [6] | 4a. Fairy Tale | 2:54 |

Three Hungarian Folk Songs (SSAA, 1950)

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------|------|
| [7] | 1. The Handsome Butcher | 1:04 |
| [8] | 2. Apple, apple | 1:55 |
| [9] | 3. The Old Woman | 0:44 |

Two Soldiers' Songs (TTBB, 1932)

- | | | |
|------|------------------|------|
| [10] | Spring (Tavas) | 1:01 |
| [11] | Farewell (Búcsú) | 3:15 |

Missa Brevis (SATB, 1924, with plainsong)

- | | | |
|------|--------------------|------|
| [12] | Kyrie | 3:27 |
| [13] | Gloria (plainsong) | 3:37 |
| [14] | Credo (plainsong) | 4:11 |
| [15] | Sanctus | 1:14 |
| [16] | Benedictus | 1:41 |
| [17] | Agnus Dei | 3:58 |

- | | | |
|------|---------------------|------|
| [18] | Sirmio (SATB, 1956) | 3:08 |
|------|---------------------|------|

Two Madrigals (SATB, 1927-29)

- | | | |
|------|---------------------------|------|
| [19] | Ghost (Gespenst) | 3:28 |
| [20] | The Problem (Das Problem) | 1:42 |

Three Nonsense Songs (SATB, 1956)

- | | | |
|------|-----------------------------------|------|
| [21] | There was an old lady of France | 0:55 |
| [22] | There was an old person of Cromer | 1:03 |
| [23] | There was an old man in a tree | 0:58 |

Soldier's Farewell (SATB, 1960) – Kahn

Gloria in Excelsis (SSAA, 1962) – Gibbs

Media Vita in morte sumus (SATB, 1960) – Kodály

- | | | |
|------|---|------|
| [24] | Soldier's Farewell (SATB, 1960) – Kahn | 3:15 |
| [25] | Gloria in Excelsis (SSAA, 1962) – Gibbs | 1:10 |
| [26] | Media Vita in morte sumus (SATB, 1960) – Kodály | 4:27 |

Three Graces (SATB, 1958)

- | | | |
|------|-----|------|
| [27] | I | 0:42 |
| [28] | II | 0:51 |
| [29] | III | 0:56 |

Zwei Schweinekarbonaden (TTB, 1930)

Total duration: 60:05

Tracks 24, 25 and 26 include three pieces by Erich Itor Kahn (1905-56), Alan Gibbs (b.1932) and Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967) respectively. All three have a personal connection to Mátyás Seiber.

Mátyás Seiber a cappella

Yugoslav, Hungarian & Nonsense Songs

& other
choral music



Choir of the 21st Century
conducted by
HOWARD WILLIAMS

Recording Producer: Siva Oke Recording Engineer: Kenneth Blair
Recording Location: Rosslyn Hill Chapel, London NW3 on 14 & 15 October 2011

Front Cover: Hungarian couple dancing a traditional dance, 1943 (colour litho)
by Hungarian School, (20th Century) Private Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library
Front cover design and typesetting: Andrew Giles

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Mátyás Seiber

Mátyás Seiber (1905 – 60) graduated from the Academy of his native Budapest and before his arrival in England in 1935, during a mass exodus from Nazism, he had taught in Frankfurt (where he founded the first course to study the theory and practice of jazz).

He made a huge impact on the teaching of composition in England in the 1940s and 1950s and was regarded as the foremost composition teacher of his generation. His pupils included Don Banks, Ingvar Lidholm, Peter Racine Fricker, Hugh Wood and Alan Gibbs, Anthony Gilbert, Malcolm Lipkin and Michael Graubart as well as many others less well known. Some were taught at Morley College, where he held a teaching position from 1942 and others were taught at home in Caterham.

He also had his own choir – the Dorian Singers – whose many concerts and BBC broadcasts were a vehicle for developing his on-going interest in Folk Music – French Medieval, early English, Yugoslav & Hungarian (as featured here). It also gave opportunities for his impish sense of humour to show, as indicated here in the Nonsense Songs.

A good linguist by nature, his gaze alighted on many nations and songs – much assisted in translation for singers by his great friend the tenor A. L. Lloyd. His vocal output was not confined to only A Cappella – many of the Folk Songs – French popular, Medieval & Old, Greek and some on this disc have arrangements with accompaniment by a variety of instruments. The Cantata *Ulysses* written for Peter Pears, requires a full orchestra and is regarded as one of his greatest achievements.

Much overlooked after his tragic early death at the age of 55, the last 6 years have seen both the centenary of his birth & 50 years' anniversary of his death. Both anniversaries occasioned celebratory concerts in Germany/Hungary/USA as well as the UK.

Recordings of his instrumental and vocal music have been released in Hungary and the UK and further discs of his vocal music and other music are being released in Australia and the UK.

Many school choristers will have sung the *Hungarian Folk Songs* at some point, several cathedral choirs will have done the *Missa Brevis*. Always highly regarded by his peers as a composer & teacher of composition, his output included many genres across the spectrum including arrangements of early music to 12 tone, even a song in the top 20!

His own teacher, Kodály, certainly had not forgotten – the lament composed by him on hearing of his erstwhile pupil's death (included here) speaks volumes. His widow, Lilla, survived him by over half a century and was aware of the imminent production of this CD – but unfortunately did not live long enough to hear it.

Julia Seiber Boyd © 2011

Mátyás Seiber – his *a cappella* legacy

Renowned as a teacher, Mátyás Seiber's own music covered many styles and media. Being a Kodály pupil he embraced choral music, composing important cantatas and the *a cappella* pieces recorded for this CD. His death in a car accident in South Africa was a tragic interruption when he was at the height of his powers.

Yugoslav Folk Songs (SATB, 1942) begin with a Serbian song, *The Unfaithful Lover*. The opening phrase is identical to that of Tchaikovsky's Slavonic March with its descending scale containing an augmented 2nd. *Handsome Mirko*, Bosnian with the same interval, bursts in with a new urgency, and is cleverly paired with *Eighteen Shining Buttons*: Mirko clearly one of the soldiers who burnish their brasses 'just to please the lasses'.

Both songs are repeated. *Heaven Above* contrasts three passionate phrases in solo tenor with six shorter ones in the chorus; this process is repeated with Soprano solo. *Hussars* is a jolly major-key soldiers' song, coupled with a yearning minor *Fairy Tale*.

Three Hungarian Folk Songs were published more recently (SSAA, as here, 1950, and SATB, 1955). All three melodies were collected by Bartók. A. L. ('Bert') Lloyd is in fine form, as in the Yugoslav set (with Fred Harry), furnishing racy English texts. *The Handsome Butcher*, John Brown in his high boots, strides proudly up a major chord; Seiber extends his three phrases to four to increase the possibilities. The tenderly sentimental *Apple, apple* is interposed before the first song returns, and the set finishes with an uninhibited, non-PC children's romp, *The Old Woman*. **Two Soldiers' Songs** (TTBB, 1932), also Hungarian, have been supplied with felicitous translations by Howard Williams. Alike in metre, rhythm, melody and harmony, they also share a common sadness: parting from a loved one to join the regiment.

The *Missa Brevis* of 1924 dates from Budapest Academy days, but its maturity belies this. A Dorian-mode study in two parts, it achieves variety by using different textures and doublings. Full-blooded Sanctus and Osanna are separated by a quiet canonic Benedictus; most memorable are the long melismas in Kyrie and Agnus Dei, clearly inspired by plainsong. The Gloria selected for this CD is from the Missa Kyrie Fons Bonitatis, followed by Credo IV from Liber Usualis.

Sirmio Seiber was enchanted by Catullus's villa in Sirmione. 'The poem he wrote to this charming place of his retreat is displayed in the village, and ever since I read it there I wanted to set it to music.' This carefully-worked SATB setting is dated 'Caterham May 1956'. Subsequently dedicated to the Elizabethan Singers, it was premiered by them at the Wigmore Hall in April 1959. In the central *Calmo* section a solo soprano sings to a murmuring choral background restfully suggesting Lake Garda; the poet's joyful awakening ends in laughter, distilled from the first syllable of 'cachinnorum'.

Two Madrigals (SATB, 1927-29) The sense of humour which Hoffnung recruited for one of his festivals was years before manifest in this Morgenstern nonsense. *Gespenst* introduces a ghost who eats handkerchiefs, and *Das Problem* an elf called Zwölf-Elf ('12-11'), who dislikes his name so much he changes it to... Twenty-three. Wholly modern, these settings are delightfully tongue-in-cheek. **Three Nonsense Songs** (SATB, 1956) were written 'for the Dorian Singers', whom Seiber conducted from their formation in 1945. Lear, Morgenstern's English equivalent, is given a more conventional but equally effective treatment in these limericks.

Three pieces by other composers with a personal connection follow. Erich Itor Kahn (1905-56) was a close friend in Frankfurt who also fled Nazism, ultimately to New York, where he was – sad irony – killed in a car accident. There are cryptic references in two Seiber works – *Tre Pezzi* and *Three Fragments*, and the Dorian Singers gave the first UK broadcast of *Soldier's Farewell* (SATB) in 1960. The short *Gloria in excelsis* (SSAA, 1962) was composed in Seiber's memory by Alan Gibbs, a Dorian Singer, for the choir of Eothen School, where Seiber's daughter Julia had been a pupil. Kodály's *Media Vita in morte sumus* (SATB) was especially written for the memorial concert of 19 November 1960, where the Dorian Singers sang it under Paul Shepherd. Heart-rending clashes between major-key phrases in the sopranos persisting against harmonic changes in the other voices live in the memory.

We return to Seiber with three Latin *Graces* composed for Canford School of Music in 1958; and nonsense by J. Ringelnatz set as a jazz parody, *Zwei Schweinekarbonaden* (TTB, 1930), about two pork chops who return to the butcher to declaim 'You have been weighed in the balance and found wanting!'

Alan Gibbs © 2011

SOMM would like to thank the Seiber Trust for their financial assistance. We would also like to thank a CC21 Patron whose donation has facilitated artistic costs for the recording of this disc.

Conductor's note

Seiber's choral music perfectly displays his delightful range of tastes, as well as his characteristic mix of Hungarian-German-Englishness. On his arrival in England, he threw himself into the musical life of his new home as composer, conductor, teacher and editor, and the music which emerged reflects his internationality. Nothing could be more English than the Edward Lear limericks of the *Nonsense Songs*, and yet very similar humorous writing had inspired his earlier German *Madrigals* and *Schweinekarbonaden*. Languages represented on this recording do not include Hungarian, however, as virtually all of his Hungarian and Balkan pieces were set by the composer in English. Even the second of the *Two Soldier's Songs* was published later in English (with added humming!), and so to lend consistency I have made a new English version of both of them.

Seiber was a keen editor and conductor of Renaissance choral music, and the modality of plainsong suffuses his *Missa Brevis* – so much so, that we have chosen to include plainsong settings of the Gloria and Credo (normally omitted from a *Missa Brevis*) in order to celebrate this aspect of his music.

Howard Williams © 2011

CC21's conductor **Howard Williams** has conducted most of the UK's leading orchestras, appearing at the BBC Proms and at the Edinburgh, Leeds, Bath and Brighton Festivals, and at festivals in Budapest, Hong Kong, and throughout France and Spain. In Europe Howard has appeared in the concert seasons of many of the leading symphony orchestras. His operatic repertoire now numbers over seventy titles, with English National Opera and companies throughout Europe.

In 1989 he was appointed Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Pécs Symphony Orchestra in Hungary – now called the Pannon Philharmonic, with which since 2000 he has been Permanent Guest Conductor.

The Choir of the 21st Century was formed at the beginning of the new millennium to create performances with a 21st-century perspective. It is made up of some of London's most experienced amateur singers, performing a repertoire which is deliberately broad, both sacred and secular, to reflect the depth and richness of the choral music which is our heritage.

The choir's recordings on the SOMM label include both the Elgar and Kodály versions of *The Music Makers* (with the Oxford Orchestra da Camera) and Philip Glass's *Another Look at Harmony – Part IV* with Christopher Bowers-Broadbent (organ), both critically acclaimed. The choir's collaborations with the English Chamber Orchestra at London's Cadogan Hall have resulted in performances of which MusicalCriticism.Com wrote that it "would have been difficult to better".

Sopranos: Carolynne Cox, Elaine Close¹, Nicola Johnstone, Liz Brinsdon², Fleur Brading, Charlotte Lary, Isabel Morgan, Jane Clarke-Maxwell, Alison St-Denis.

Altos: Rosemary Burch, Penny Burton, Philippa Dodds John, Sian Evans, Virginia Harding, Lorna Perry, Louise Gowman, Marion Gaskin.

Tenors: John Cuthbert^{1,5}, Andy Evans, Alan Jolly⁵, Ian Priest, Paul Renney, John Perry, Patrick Palmer, Nigel Eastman.

Basses: Graham Cooper³, Douglas Lee, Richard Lea, David Henderson, Martin Johnson¹, Nigel Press, Chris Moore⁴, James Jirtle.

Soloists: *Yugoslav Folk Songs*¹; *Sirmio*²; *Two Madrigals*³; *Plainsong*⁴; *Schweinekarbonaden*⁵ (with Howard Williams)

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TEXTS & TRANSLATIONS

YUGOSLAV FOLK SONGS

I. The Unfaithful Lover

Burning sun, why do you shine so fiercely?
Ah! Woe is me!
My sweetheart she loves me no longer,
my own sweetheart,
my sweetheart loves me no more.

II. Handsome Mirko

From the alehouse Mirko comes home in the dark,
heigh-ho, heigh-yadeeho!
and his sweetheart throws her shutters wide apart.

Ila. Eighteen Shining Buttons

With some milk we're rubbing,
with some bread we're scrubbing
eighteen shining buttons.
As we sing so sprightly,
see them shine so brightly,
eighteen shining buttons.
From the window out she stretched her hand so white,
oh so white, heigh-yadeeho!
No one sees them kissing wildly in the night.
Just to please the lasses,
burnish all your brasses,
eighteen shining buttons.
Come, my lads, no dreaming,
set them all a-gleaming,
eighteen shining buttons, hi!

III. Heaven Above

Heaven, heaven above,
oh, my dearest love!
With your hands so tender,
with your fingers slender,
you have torn away my heart.

IV. Hussars

See the bold hussars,
ah see the fine hussars
come riding so sprightly,
and how their swords shine brightly.
Here we come, lasses,
look out for our horses,
we'll set your hearts breaking
when we begin love-making.
Do not weep, mother,
oh do not weep, father,
for no sweetheart's bolder
than is my fine young soldier.

IVa. Fairy Tale

Down the mountain flows the icy stream.
There the wild rose flowers sweetly in the valley green.
There a maiden plucked a flower growing by the stream,
and at once she fell a-sleeping and began to dream.
Let me take you, lovely maiden, to a distant shore:
you and I will be so happy there for evermore.

(A. L. Lloyd & Fred Harry)

THREE HUNGARIAN FOLK SONGS

I. The Handsome Butcher

Seven locks upon the red gate,
seven gates about the red town.
In the town there lives a butcher
and his name is Handsome John Brown.
John Brown's boots are polished so fine,
John Brown's spurs, they jingle and shine.
On his coat a crimson flower,
in his hand a glass of red wine.
In the night the golden spurs ring,
in the dark the leather boots shine.
Don't come tapping at my window,
now your heart no longer is mine.

II. Apple, apple

By a river there's a little orchard,
in the orchard stood the miller's daughter.
Apple, apple, fallen in the water,
by the stream I kissed the miller's daughter.

III. The Old Woman

In the window, out the front door,
throw old nanny from the top floor.
Pack her head into a basket,
let her sell it in the market.
Come on, children, welcome each one,
at our party we'll have good fun,
drink and eat and roister all day,
Farmer Johnny's bullock will pay.
For a coachman we've a black dog,
for a footman we've a roast hog,
on his back a loaf of white bread,
and a bottle on his big head.

(A. L. Lloyd)

TWO SOLDIER'S SONGS (Két Katonadal)

I. Spring (Tavaszi)

Snow is melting, see, my little angel,
springtime follows surely.
In your little garden plot
the rosebuds will be early.
I shall never be your rose;
so much Jóska Ferenc knows,
up there in his barracks in Vienna,
lording it above me.

II. Farewell (Búcsú)

When I'm marching off to Galicia,
then the trees are crying.
Leaves are falling from the weeping willows,
with them I am sighing.
Cry then, cry then, weeping willow.
Tell my love that soon we are to part.
Bend down gently, whisper in her ear
of how it breaks my heart, my darling,
how it breaks my heart.

I have grown just like a branch of my dear mother's rose tree.
But I also am a soldier of the King of Hungary.
On my shoulders I feel the torture
telling me that we shall part.
I must go now far away to battle,
dying from pain here in my heart, my darling,
dying from pain here in my heart.

(Tr. H. Williams)

MISSA BREVIS

I. Kyrie

Kyrie eleison; Christe eleison;
Kyrie eleison.

*Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy;
Lord, have mercy.*

(Gloria: plainsong)

Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax
hominibus bonae voluntatis.
Laudamus te ...

*Glory be to God on high, and in earth peace,
good will towards men.
We praise thee...*

(Credo: plainsong)

Credo in unum Deum,
Patrem omnipotentem,
factorem caeli et terrae...

*I believe in one God
the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth...*

II. Sanctus

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus
Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
Pleni sunt caeli et terra Gloria tua.
Osanna in excelsis.

*Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God of hosts,
heaven and earth are full of thy glory.
Hosanna in the highest.*

III. Benedictus

Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.
Osanna in excelsis.

*Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.*

IV. Agnus Dei

Agnus Dei. qui tollis peccata mundi:
miserere nobis.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi:
dona nobis pacem.

*O lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.
O lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world,
grant us thy peace.*

SIRMIO

Paeninsularum, Sirmio, insularumque
ocelle, quascumque in liquentibus stagnis
marique vasto fert uterque Neptunus,
quam te libenter quamque laetus inviso,
vix mi ipse credens Thyniam atque Bithynos
liquisse campos et videre te in tuto.
O quid solutis est beatius curis,
cum mens onus reponit, ac peregrino
labore fessi venimus larem ad nostrum
desideratoque acquiescimus lecto?
Hoc est, quod unumst pro laboribus tantis.
Salve, O venusta Sirmio, atque ero gaude:
gaudete vosque, O Lydiae lacus undae:
ridete, quicquid est domi cachinnorum.

(G. V. Catullus, tr. F. W. Cornish)

TWO MADRIGALS

I. Ghost (Gespenst)

Es gibt ein Gespenst, das frisst Taschentücher.
Es begleitet dich auf deiner Reise,
es frisst dir aus dem Koffer,
aus dem Bett, aus dem Nachttisch,
wie ein Vogel aus der Hand,
vieles weg, nicht alles, nicht auf einmal.
Mit achtzehn Tüchern, stolzer Segler,
führst du hinaus aufs Meer der Fremde.
Mit Acht bis Sieben kehrst du zurück.
Ein Gram der Hausfrau.

*Sirmio, bright eye of peninsulas and islands,
all that in liquid lakes or vast oceans either
Neptune bears:
how willingly and with what joy I revisit you,
scarcely trusting myself that I have left Thynia and
the Bithynian plains, and that I see you in safety.
Ah, what is more blessed than to put cares away,
when the mind lays by its burden, and tired with
labour of far travel we come to our own home
and rest on the couch we longed for?
This is it which alone is worth all these toils.
Welcome, lovely Sirmio, and rejoice in your master,
and rejoice ye too, waters of the Lydian lake, and
laugh out all the laughter you have in your home.*

*Just imagine a ghost that eats handkerchiefs.
It accompanies you on your journey,
it eats from your suitcase,
from your bed, from your bedside table,
from your hand like a bird,
in a variety of ways but not all at once.
With eighteen sheets, proud sailing boat,
you set forth to distant seas,
but you return with only seven or eight.
Bane of housewives!*

II. The Problem (Das Problem)

Der Zwölf-Elf kam auf sein Problem, und sprach: *An elf called Twelve-eleven had a problem.
He said 'I have the wrong name.
I might have been called, say, Three-four
instead of Seven! God forgive me!'
So from that day onwards the Twelve-eleven
called himself Twenty-three.*

(C. Morgenstern tr. A.G.)

THREE NONSENSE SONGS

I. There was an old lady of France

who taught little ducklings to dance;
when she said, 'Tick-a-tack',
they replied 'Quack!'
which grieved that old lady of France.

II. There was an old person of Cromer

who stood on one leg to read Homer;
when he found he grew stiff
he jumped over the cliff,
which concluded that person of Cromer.

III. There was an old man in a tree

who was horribly bored by a bee.
When they said, 'Does it buzz?'
he replied, 'Yes, it does!
It's a regular brute of a bee!'

(E. Lear)

SOLDIER'S FAREWELL (Kahn)

(No.1 of Three Madrigals on themes from the folklore of Eastern European Jews)

Fare thee well, oh! fare thee well, dear, beloved father,
I take leave from you today;
you've watched o'er me for twenty-one years
and now I must discard you.

Fare thee well, oh! fare thee well, dear, beloved mother,
I take leave from you today;
with your blood you have nurtured me
and now I must discard you.

Fare thee well, oh! fare thee well, dear, beloved brother,
I take leave from you today;
with the same blood have we been nurtured
and now I must discard you.

Fare thee well, oh! fare thee well, dear, beloved sister,
I take leave from you today;
your love and care have cherished me
and now I must discard you.

(Anon)

GLORIA IN EXCELSIS (Gibbs)

(As plainsong Gloria above, but ending at 'voluntatis')

MEDIA VITA IN MORTE SUMUS (Kodály)

Homo perpende fragilis,
mortalis et instabilis
quod vitare non poteris
mortem, quocunque ieris.
Nam aufert te saepissime
dum vivis libentissime.

*Man, found frail,
mortal and unsteady,
because you cannot avoid
death wherever you go,
for it most frequently deprives you of life
whilst you are taking the greatest pleasure in it.*

(Balbulus Notker tr J Thorne)

Media vita in morte sumus.
Quem quaerimus adiutorem
nisi te Domine
qui pro peccatis nostris iuste irasceris.
Sancte Deus, sancte fortis,
sancte et misericors Salvator,
amarae morti ne tradas nos!

*In the midst of life we are in death:
of whom may we seek for succour,
but of thee, O Lord, who for our sins
art justly displeased?
Yet, O Lord most holy, O Lord most mighty,
O holy and most merciful Saviour,
deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death.*

(Version found in the Book of Common Prayer, 1662:
Order for the Burial of the Dead)

GRACES

Benedictus, benedicat per Jesum Christum,
Dominum nostrum, Amen.

*Blessed one, be blessed through Jesus Christ
Our Lord, Amen.*

TWO PORK CHOPS (Zwei Schweinekarbonaden)

Es waren zwei Schweinekarbonaden,
die kehrten zurück in ihren Fleischerladen,
und sagten so ganz von oben hin:
Meneh, tekel, upharsin.

*There were two pork chops
who returned to their butcher's shop
and proclaimed
'Mene, tekel, upharsin'.*

(Cf Daniel chapter 5: the warning to King Belshazzar as interpreted by Daniel, including verse 27,
'Thou art weighed in the balances and art found wanting'.)

(J Ringelnatz)