

EQUINOX

CULTURES IN HARMONY



LOTTERY FUNDED



Koinonia

Koinonia has been specially commissioned by the City of Birmingham Choir for this Equinox: Cultures in Harmony concert. The commission brief was challenging in asking for a significant choral work for up to 400 singers arranged in six choral groups and associated percussion reflecting the cultural diversity of people living in Birmingham and the West Midlands: Chinese and South Asian; African Caribbean; Arabic and Middle Eastern; Indian; East European; and West European. The composition had to be inspired by ideas from the participating choral groups, thus requiring the composer to spend time meeting with and listening to their individual approaches to harmony and choral singing and later consulting with them as the work began to emerge.

The title Koinonia was chosen because it expresses this sense of co-production. Koinonia is an ancient Greek word which has such a multitude of meanings that no single English word is adequate to express its depth and richness. It embraces a strong commitment to *Kalos k'agathos*, meaning good and good; an inner goodness toward virtue and an outer goodness towards social relationships. In the context of outer goodness it means participation with others in a community, team, alliance or joint venture.

As an integral part of this process, the text used in this composition has been suggested by members of the participating choirs. All the words link to the central Equinox theme of equality.

Umoja is Swahili for *Unity*

Nahnu wahed is Arabic for *We are one*

Tuan tje tziu sha li liang means *Unity is strength* in Mandarin Chinese

Solidarnosc is Polish for *Solidarity*

Mile sur mera tum hara, to sur bane hamara is a Hindi phrase meaning *When my tune and yours merge, it becomes our song*

Unus pro omnibus, omnes pro uno is the Latin phrase *One for all, all for one*.

The words are spoken and shouted disjointedly in the first movement and then sung by each cultural group separately in the second movement before coming together in the conclusion.

Koinonia opens with a melody, sung by the male singers, that presents important thematic material for the rest of the piece. Wordlessly, it emerges from silence, taking time to gain momentum, to awaken. Sudden percussion interjections interrupt leading to a percussion dialogue and conflict. From this emerge vocal sounds and syllables, gradually turning into spoken words. The music is chaotic, with languages juxtaposed against each other. A climactic choral figure provides some respite from the tension but this is cut short again by the percussion leading without a break into the second movement.

The second movement introduces harmonic and melodic elements. It is a resolution to the drama of the opening movement. Each group enters in sequence. Once a group has entered, their melodic material and language are drawn into the overall texture. This continues until the final section where the same process is repeated within one extended texture, with all cultures singing in their distinct language, in harmony, with percussion adding to the climax at the end of the movement. This section is resolved through gentle descending figures, recalling earlier moments within the movement. The piece ends on a single, unified, sustained note.

Christopher Long and Martin Willis

मिले सुर मेरा तुम्हारा, तो सुर बने हमारा Umoja
نحن واحدة 团结就是力量
Solidarność Unus pro omnibus, omnes pro uno

EQUINOX

Cultures In Harmony

Presenter: Anita Bhalla OBE

Conductor: Adrian Lucas

with

The City of Birmingham Choir

Bournville Young Singers

Black Voices

Chinese Community Centre Birmingham Wan Cheuk Choir

Birmingham Conservatoire Chinese and South Asian Student Group

Echo Doliny Polish Folk Choir

Sanchita Pal Ensemble

SHAAM

Town Hall Gospel Choir

World Music Youth Choir

Fieshah Amlak Drummers

Birmingham Schools' Percussion Ensemble

Birmingham Schools' Azaad Dhol Group

Including the World Premiere of

KOINONIA

by Christopher Long

Symphony Hall, Birmingham

Saturday 17 March 2012, 7.30pm

Equinox - A Magical Journey

by Martin Willis, Equinox Project Director

Early in 2010, the City of Birmingham Choir Development Forum approved a report to the CBC Board which asked "Could we explore the potential of choral singing to bring people together in Birmingham?" The report quoted from an article in the Independent which highlighted the growing interest in choral singing and its potential benefits to individuals and communities:

When Robert Wyatt of the Sixties rock group Soft Machine had an accident that broke his back, it ended his career as a drummer. But it relaunched his life as a singer. There are now more choirs in the UK than fish and chip shops, and a spate of television programmes about choral singing suggest that, as Wyatt puts it, "singing together is so much more than making a noise with voices." In the future, he says, "someone will figure out how it works its magic in the brain."

The Board agreed to set up a project group which started to make contact with potential partners. We chose a bottom up approach through community groups to find out what was happening at the grass roots. People we spoke with were enthusiastic and slowly but surely we began to build a network of partners. By the summer, we had enough support to convince the CBC Board formally to back the project and with inspired discussion at the Development Forum, Equinox was born. Right from the start, the idea emerged of linking the project with the 2012 Olympics so we booked Symphony Hall and successfully completed the Cultural Olympiad Inspire Mark application forms.

Next up was to choose a composer to write a new work for all the groups to perform together. We knew that nothing on this scale had ever been attempted before and that we were asking a lot of anyone to follow our detailed commission brief. However, Chris Long had worked with CBC before and we were impressed by his commitment to build upwards by listening to the ways different groups wanted to contribute to the project rather than impose his own formulaic ideas.

One of the partners invited me to hear the University Singers of the West Indies at the Adrian Boulton Hall, a truly uplifting experience and another friend gave me the amazing Simunye CD, a collaboration between I Fagiolini and the Soweto SDASA Chorale. I was then lucky enough to hear

the Hadra Dhikr in Damascus, opera in Gdansk, Maori songs on Waitangi Day and massed childrens' voices outside Chongqing's People's Great Hall. My belief that singing was a universal way of communicating emotions between peoples was utterly confirmed. The journey from these beginnings until today has had lots of ups and downs. The 1st partner meeting was held at Ulfah Arts in October 2010. Some of the original partner organisations reluctantly had to withdraw because of funding issues and we were back to square one finding replacements. Others, such as the Chinese and Indian groups, had to be grown from scratch. Such turbulence caused delays and work by Chris on the

There are two moments in every year when the sun is directly overhead at the Equator. These occur around the 20/21 March and 22/23 September and produce the world-wide phenomenon when day and night are the same length. These are the Equinoxes.

Cultures In Harmony

commission got behind schedule. But the partners kept meeting, latterly at the Polish Millennium Centre. and the dream was kept alive.

ArtsFest 2011 was the first real test of whether Equinox was going to happen. So when over 100 singers and percussionists and an audience of 50+ met for a workshop in the CBSO Centre to learn and perform Chris Long's initial bars of music, the relief and excitement was tangible. It was also here that the text for Koinonia was chosen by members of the performing groups. Since then, groups started rehearsing their own chosen works and as the score of Koinonia arrived in tantalising sections, two half-day workshops brought everyone together. Comments from participants ranged from "the rehearsal sounded phenomenal" to uncertainty about whether we would get it all together.

It's been an incredible journey lit up by the warmth, generosity and belief of the people who have made it happen. I hope that tonight's concert communicates something of this passion, commitment and magic. Thank you for coming to share the end of this journey with us – or maybe just the beginning of the next chapter.

Martin Willis - Equinox Project Director



The idea for an inter-cultural choral project developed from Martin's strong belief in the value of the contribution made by all groups to the richness of Birmingham's cultural life. Martin saw the Cultural Olympiad as a exceptional opportunity for a special event, not just to bring the various choral traditions together to perform, but uniquely to enable them to participate in a single, specially commissioned choral work to celebrate the Olympic values of Excellence, Respect and Friendship. Equinox is the culmination of that vision.

Choral singing is in Martin's blood. He was a chorister at St Paul's Cathedral and later a choral scholar at Clare College, Cambridge. He has been a member of the bass section of City of Birmingham Choir for 14 years and is a former chair. Martin has lived and worked in Birmingham for most of his professional career, initially as a social worker and subsequently in university education. He was a councillor on the former West Midlands County Council and worked with many people from Birmingham's diverse cultures and communities both then and subsequently.

*Since
ancient times,
humans have celebrated
at the equinox - the
coming of Spring with its
promise of rebirth and
creation following the
hardships of winter.*

Anita Bhalla OBE

Anita Bhalla is currently Editor Public Space Broadcasting for the BBC. This is a UK wide project running a number of Big Screens and Live Sites in collaboration with London 2012, City Council, Arts, Education and Community organisations.

Her other activities outside of work include being chair of the Midlands Arts Centre (**mac**) one of the largest community based arts centres in the country. She is also a trustee of Town Hall/Symphony Hall and a governor of Joseph Chamberlain College and the Chancellor of Birmingham Children's University.

In the past she has been a member of the Department of Education and Employment's Race Management Committee Asian Resource Centre, Education and Employment Forum; Home Secretary nominee on the appointments panel for the West Midlands Police; Culture West Midlands and of Birmingham City Council's Stephen Lawrence Public Policy Review Panel which carried out a comprehensive review of the services offered by the City and recommended action and policy changes. In 2010-2011 Anita was the High Sheriff for the West Midlands.

She trained as a teacher and subsequently worked as a Community Relations Officer in Leicester, and a Community Worker with the Asian Resource Centre in Handsworth, Birmingham, where she set up and ran a hostel for Asian Women (one of the first in the country). She has also worked as a lecturer teaching language and employment skills to Industrial workers in the Midlands, alongside training their managers in equal opportunity practices.

Anita's career in broadcasting has been varied. From presenting a local radio programme for the Asian Community in Birmingham she went on to present Channel 4's Eastern Eye (the first



Asian magazine programme in English). She then took up full time employment with the BBC and developed the Radio Asian Network in the West Midlands (this is now a national digital service).

Her next move was to BBC Television News, where she became one of the first regionally based bi-media correspondents when she became the Community Affairs Correspondent for the Midlands. She produced several documentaries for network television and national radio as well as daily news reports. She also had her own series on Radio 2. She went on to become Social Affairs and Education Correspondent and for a while took on the role of Editor Newsgathering and Managing Editor of one of the region's local radio stations (BBC Hereford and Worcester).

Anita has won several awards including the CRE Race in the Media national Television News Award. In 2000 she won the Impact Magazines Windrush Award as the Broadcaster of the Year. She has very recently stepped down as President of Circom Regional, a European wide group of public service regional broadcasters. In 2007, Anita received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Wolverhampton for services to Media and Community. In 2009 she was awarded an OBE for her services to broadcasting.

Adrian Lucas



Adrian Lucas has been Musical Director of the City of Birmingham Choir since 2002, continuing a long and distinguished line which includes David Willcocks, Meredith Davies and Christopher Robinson. Like them, his musical roots lie in cathedral music and he held posts at St John's College Cambridge and Portsmouth, Norwich and Salisbury Cathedrals before moving to Worcester Cathedral in 1996. During his tenure there, he was responsible for the design and installation of the Kenneth Tickell Quire organ in 2008 as well as continuing a vibrant programme of touring, broadcasting and recording with the Cathedral Choir.

In 1996 he was also appointed Artistic Director to the Worcester Three Choirs Festival. From then until 2011 he was directly responsible for 5 Worcester festivals, introducing a wide variety of new musical threads to the great tradition of this long-lived institution. These included commissioned works from Francis Pott, Andrew Gant, Jackson Hill and Cheryl Frances-Hoad; a number of cross-over concerts including performances of music from the Sacred Concerts of Duke Ellington and late night events by the David Rees-Williams Trio, Respectable Groove and Acoustic Triangle; and plenty of opportunities to hear the choristers and layclerks of the three Cathedral Choirs in action.

Since leaving the cathedral world, he has been able to refocus his work on performance, working as a conductor, choral director and animateur, organist and continuo specialist. His work with the City of Birmingham Choir forms an important part of this. As a conductor, Adrian has an impressive list of works to his name, including many performances of the choral works of Elgar, Vaughan Williams and Finzi; contemporary works by James Macmillan, John Tavener and Jonathan Dove; jazz-inspired music by Gershwin, Bernstein and Ibert; concertos with John Lill, Julian Lloyd-Webber and Emma Johnson; not to mention great symphonic works from the classical geni of Mozart and Beethoven through to Janacek and Walton. This year he will be directing a number of projects in connection with the Cultural Olympiad of the 2012 Games, as well as a new work by Chris Long and a rarely heard performance of the *Requiem* by Robert Schumann.

As an organist, Adrian continues to give recitals both nationally and internationally. He has played in churches and concert halls from Sydney to Seattle and particularly enjoys broadening the instrument's repertoire into the realms of jazz.

Adrian is also active as a composer, arranger and orchestrator. He has a portfolio of pieces to his name which includes choral works from short *a capella* carols and motets through to *Creation Canticles*, a 41 minute work for solo soprano, chorus and orchestra. Alongside this are many arrangements for brass ensemble, mainly commissioned for special occasions, and a number of transcriptions of orchestral works. He is currently working on scoring works for Nick Bicat who has written over 150 scores and soundtracks for film, television and theatre.

Christopher Long



Chris Long was born in 1973 in Widnes, Cheshire. He gained a first class degree in fine art and music at the University of Liverpool, studying composition with Stephen Pratt. A grant from the Ralph Vaughan Williams Trust Fund enabled him to study composition at postgraduate level at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. There he studied composition with Roger Redgate and Agustin Fernandez.

His music has been performed throughout the UK by various ensembles including the Orchestra of Opera North, the Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral orchestra, the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Lontano, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, and the City of Birmingham Choir as well as being broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

During 2004-2005 he was Composer in Association with the City of Birmingham Choir as part of the PRS / Making Music / spnm Adopt a Composer Scheme. His music featured in the London Wind Festival, the spnm Mersey New Sounds Festival, and in the Norfolk and Norwich Festival and has been shortlisted several times by spnm.

In 2006 he received the British Composer Award in the Making Music category for *O Lord, Remember* composed for the City of Birmingham Choir.

Earth Day on March 20, is when people from all nations, religions and cultural backgrounds celebrate their similarities: living on earth. For others, Earth Day is observed to promote the protection of the natural environment.

Recent work has focused on education, amateur and younger musicians. He is currently Head of Music at Saint Augustine's Catholic High School in Redditch and is the coordinator of the Worcestershire Arts Education songwriting project 'Music and Lyrics'.

He currently lives in Leamington Spa.

Percussion Fanfare

John Barber's Percussion Fanfare (2012) has been especially composed to open this Equinox concert. It brings together musicians from all of the three percussion groups, the Birmingham Schools' Azaad Dhol Group, Fieshah Amlak Drummers and the Birmingham Schools Percussion Ensemble. To enable the groups to prepare for tonight's performance, John not only wrote the score but also created rehearsal audio media files for each of the parts.

The Fanfare is a short piece designed for groups of many differing musical backgrounds and abilities to join together and perform. It starts with a 'call' and an 'answer' motif, which has been a common feature in all musical cultures from the early ages. This opens with the snare drum, followed by djembe and congas and thirdly the dhol.

The work then develops by involving a wide range of percussive instruments including vibraphone, piano, cymbals and clapping. During the piece each percussion group has a solo or becomes the focus of the dynamic interplay between the groups. The Fanfare culminates in all groups playing together exuberantly to create a dramatic climax.

John Barber



In 1994 John Barber, then a teenager, was inspired to write his first composition, which he entered into a Carol writing competition, run by the City of Birmingham Choir, and won! This experience inspired him to continue composing. He has since written two more songs for City Choir concerts and has continued to write many more choral works for Midlands based choirs, including Enchant who he directs. Five years ago he enjoyed having one of his works played on local radio and he continues to compose and arrange as part of his profession as a piano player and teacher.

Jessica Armitage



Jessica Armitage is a music student at the University of Coventry in the West Midlands. She was introduced to the piano at an early age by Anne Ellis (leader of Bournville Young Singers) and developed her musicality under her tutelage over the next several years. In time she herself became involved in the introduction of children to the piano, and has played as accompanist as well as giving solo performances in local concerts and functions abroad.

While the piano has remained her principal instrument, Jessica plays the violin and viola, and as such, was a member of various orchestras and quartets during her school career. She has played in many venues including the Adrian Boult Hall, Symphony Hall, and the Albert Hall in London.

Tonight Jessica plays in the opening Percussion Fanfare and Koinonia.

The Cultural Olympiad

We are honoured that the Equinox Project has been awarded the 2012 London Olympics Cultural Olympiad Inspire Mark, the logo that appears in this programme. The founder of the modern Olympics, Pierre de Coubertin, believed that Olympic athletic competition promotes understanding across cultures. In tune with this, the Cultural Olympiad aims to celebrate the UK's unique cultural diversity, to inspire young people and to generate a positive legacy.

The Cultural Olympiad is the largest cultural celebration in the history of the modern Olympic and Paralympic movements. Already, more than 16 million people across the UK have taken part in, or attended, performances embracing a huge variety of music, dance, theatre, film, circus and lots of other creative public arts. The 2012 West Midlands Cultural Olympiad programme was launched earlier this week in Birmingham by Jonathan Edwards, gold medallist at Sydney in 2000. Incidentally, several members of the City of Birmingham Choir sang in the opening concert of the Sydney cultural festival in the Olympic superdome, performing Mahler's Symphony of a thousand as part of a chorus drawn from UK and Australia.

Equinox reflects the Olympic values of 'respect' for different cultures; 'excellence' in the power of people to create experiences that motivate and inspire; and 'friendship' through forging links between peoples based on a shared passion for humanity. No other international event reflects the rich variety of peoples and cultures in the world like the Olympics. London's cultural diversity was highlighted right at the start as being key to the city's bid to win the 2012 games. This view was warmly supported by Nelson Mandela when he praised London as *"a wonderfully diverse and open city providing a home to hundreds of different nationalities from all over the world."* We believe that Birmingham, with the breadth and depth of its multi cultural heritage, is perfectly placed to embrace this theme.

We hope Equinox has a long term legacy building on our rewarding experiences in working with the children and young people who are singing and playing percussion in tonight's concert. The newly formed Chinese and Indian choirs plan to continue to meet. This project also aims to inspire future collaborations between peoples of different cultures in the West Midlands, opening doors for the participating groups to work together creating artistic excellence and fostering cultural understanding, friendship and respect.

Martin Willis, Equinox Project Director



Thursday 21 June, 7.30pm
at Symphony Hall, Birmingham



CITY OF BIRMINGHAM
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

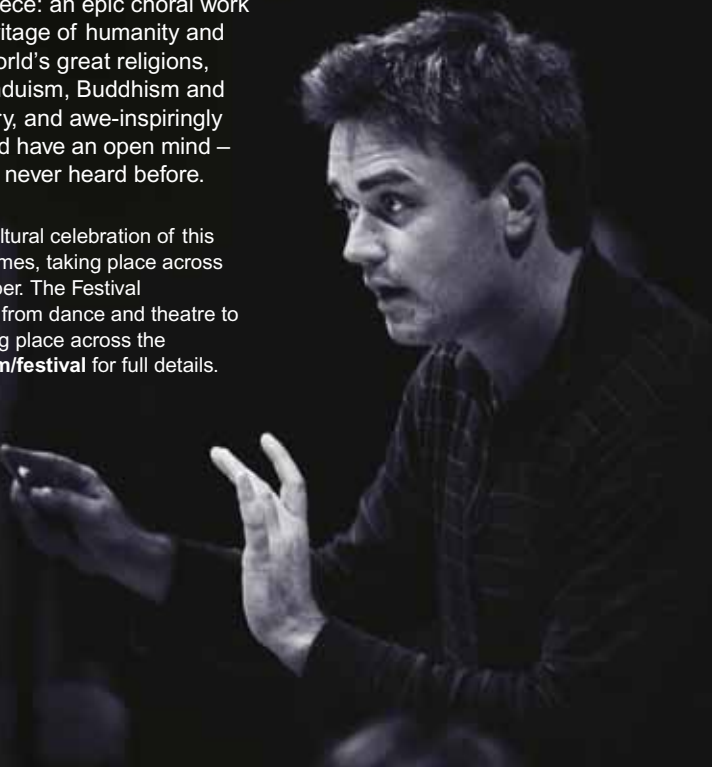
LONDON 2012 FESTIVAL OPENING CONCERT: JONATHAN HARVEY'S WELTETHOS

Edward Gardner - conductor
CBSO Chorus, Youth Chorus & Children's Chorus

Harvey: Weltethos (UK premiere) 90'

The world's greatest music - made in Birmingham.
Born in Sutton Coldfield, Jonathan Harvey is recognised as one of the world's greatest living composers. So, to help open the London 2012 Festival, we're thrilled to present the UK premiere of his latest masterpiece: an epic choral work inspired by the shared spiritual heritage of humanity and founded on texts from six of the world's great religions, Confucianism, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. It's expansive, visionary, and awe-inspiringly beautiful. If you love great art – and have an open mind – prepare to hear sounds like you've never heard before.

The London 2012 Festival is a huge cultural celebration of this summer's Olympic and Paralympic Games, taking place across the country from 21 June to 9 September. The Festival encompasses a huge range of events, from dance and theatre to fashion and film - and there's lots taking place across the Midlands. Go to www.london2012.com/festival for full details.



TICKETS: £20 all areas

A £2.50 fee per transaction will be charged on all bookings by THSH Box Office, except purchases made in person.

BOX OFFICE: 0121 780 3333

Special offer: £15 tickets for Equinox ticket holders.
Quote CBGI when booking by phone on 0121 780 3333 or in person at Symphony Hall box office.

BOOK ONLINE: www.cbso.co.uk (full price tickets only)



City of Birmingham Choir



Since 1921, the City of Birmingham Choir has constantly thrilled and entertained audiences with our wide and often adventurous repertoire. Singing first in the historic Town Hall and, more recently, in the magnificent acoustics of Symphony Hall we have also enjoyed an enormously productive musical partnership with the city's internationally famous orchestra, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. We include most of the major choral works in our repertoire plus more challenging and newer compositions. The standard of our performances draws consistent praise from both critics and audience.

Currently we are helping to develop the next generation of choral performers with Voice Factory – an enterprising scheme providing vocal training for the Choir and encouraging the participation of young people in singing. We are very proud to be one of the few independent organisations promoting and financing a full season of major choral concerts with professional symphony orchestras and soloists. Equinox is being promoted and managed by the City of Birmingham Choir.

You can find out more on their website: www.citychoir.org.uk

Performing

R Vaughan Williams' **Three Shakespeare Songs** were specially composed for The British Federation of Music Festivals National Competition Festival in 1951.

Full Fathom Five is Ariel's song about creation and death.

The Cloud Capp'd Towers is Prospero's speech about visions and dreams.

Over Hill, Over Dale is a fairy's song about the beauties of nature.

The Spring Equinox marks the New Year in a number of different calendars with some recognising the March date (e.g. Iran and Bahá'í) and others an April date (e.g. Tamil, Bengali and Ugadi in India).

Bournville Young Singers



Located in South Birmingham, Bournville Young Singers is a community youth choir whose on-going aim is to encourage children and young people to sing, to develop their vocal skills and musical knowledge, and to participate in regular and varied concerts.

The choir is for children of all ages, and it is divided into a number of sections based on age and experience. Most new members start in the Training Choir (minimum age 5 years), with the intention being that they then continue building on their singing skills in Main Choir, and possibly progress into Chamber Choir. There is no strict upper age limit for our members, although this generally is around 18/19.

The music sung in each of our choirs is varied in style and origin, generally (but not strictly) secular, and designed to challenge the singers at each stage of their skill development. We aim to give each child a Voice for Life through our ethos of education, experience and encouragement. Above all, we try to use music as the amazing tool that it is... A gateway to self-confidence, friendship, knowledge and fun!

Performing

Sumer Is Icumen In - is a song of Spring and a traditional English Round. It is the oldest known example of counterpoint in existence, attributed to W de Wycombe around 1260 AD.

It was sung by children at the opening ceremony of the Munich Olympics in 1972.

*The
March Equinox
has been chosen
to celebrate
World Citizen Day,
Earth Day and
World Storytelling Day.*

EQUINOX

Percussion Fanfare

(John Barber, 2012)

Birmingham Schools' Percussion Ensemble and Azaad Dhol Group with Fieshah Amlak Drummers

Sumer Is Icumen In

(attr. W de Wycombe c1260)

Bournville Young Singers with City of Birmingham Choir

Sang Gachchhadwang

(trad. Vaidik Mantra Sanskrit Chant)

Sanchita Pal Ensemble

Hai Ujjala Din

(Bengali song translated into Hindi)

Dwa Serduszka

(trad. arr. S Hatfield)

Echo Doliny Polish Folk Choir

Ruciany Wianek (excerpts)

(trad. arr. Z Gedl)

Szumi Jawor

(trad. arr. by U Weber)

Pearl Of The Orient (東方之珠)

(Lo Ta-yu 1991)

Chinese Community Centre
Birmingham Wan Cheuk Choir

Tale Of The City

(Koo Ka Fai & Yung Ching Kie 1978)

Gong Xi Gong Xi

(Chen Gexin, 1946)

Overture & Steal Away Medley

Choir

(arr. M Warren, S Kilby, D Adell,
C Dent, J Hogue 1992)

Black Voices and Town Hall Gospel

मिले सुर मेरा तुम्हारा, तो सुर बने हमारा

Umoja

نحن واحدة



Cultures In Harmony

The Lioness Hunt

(Lebohang Morake)

World Music Youth Choir

O Lord Be Generous To Us

O Light Of My Eyes

To The Beloved Lands

As Long As I Protest My Love

The First Spring

(All trad. arr. SHAAM 2004)

SHAAM

INTERVAL

Three Shakespeare Songs

Full Fathom Five

The Cloud Capp'd Towers

Over Hill, Over Dale

(R Vaughan Williams 1951)

City Of Birmingham Choir

In Praise Of Eight Horses

(arr Se Enkhbayer)

Birmingham Conservatoire Chinese
and South Asian Student Group

Sinjenje - We Are What We Are

(Colin Anderson 2009)

Black Voices and Town Hall Gospel
Choir

KOINONIA

*(Christopher Long 2012,
World Premiere)*

All Choirs and Percussion

团结就是力量

Solidarność Unus pro omnibus, omnes pro uno

SHAAM



SHAAM came together in late 1997 seeking to present and re-interpret traditional Islamic songs known as nasheeds. These spiritually uplifting songs seek to praise Allah and His final Messenger. They are distinguished by their emphasis upon vocals and percussion only, with stringed and wind instruments being shunned in deference to orthodox Islamic precepts. It is this style of song that SHAAM have mastered over the past few years. The group, composed of Haroon Bashir, Mahmood Norris, Yasin Alamand and Imran Bashir – all young men from Birmingham, took their name from the place that had inspired them: Syria (in Arabic, Shaam). All had at some stage or another studied and visited Damascus and there had come into contact with groups who would sing timeless nasheeds with moving lyrics, accompanied by the rousing and intricate beating of the duff, a traditional one-sided hand drum.

Presenting themselves as heirs of this unique, ancient Islamic art, SHAAM have sought to make nasheeds accessible to young and old, and, mindful of the fact that the majority of their audiences do not understand Arabic, have added Urdu and English nasheeds to their large repertoire of songs. Their stirring renditions, coupled with exquisite drumming, have led to invitations to perform in countries as far afield as the USA, Syria and Pakistan. It is no exaggeration to say hundreds of thousands have witnessed the mastery of SHAAM live and the group considers itself fortunate to count the likes of Prince Charles amongst its many admirers. You can find out more about SHAAM on their website: www.shaamgroup.com.

Performing

**O Lord Be Generous To Us
O Light Of My Eyes
To The Beloved Lands
As Long As I protest My Love
The First Spring**

This traditional Arabic medley arranged by SHAAM includes texts from Shaykh Ibn Arabi's masterpiece on God, unity and love; Syrian Gnostic and text by Shaykh Mustafa Al Margy.

*The day of the
March Equinox is a
holiday in many countries
including Albania, Azerbaijan,
Afghanistan, Egypt, India, Japan,
Tunisia, Turkey and Zanzibar.*

Sanchita Pal Ensemble



The Sanchita Pal Ensemble has been specially formed to take part in Equinox.

Sanchita Pal is one of the most accomplished Hindustani (North Indian) Classical and Semi-Classical singers resident in the UK. She was born in a musical family in India and has been living in Birmingham since 1994.

She began her musical career under the able guidance of eminent gurus Prof Prakity Majumdar, Dr Aradhana Dey, Pandit Amiya Ranjan Banerjee and Pandit Ajoy Chakrabarty. Sanchita excels in Khayal, Thumri, Bhajan, Nazrulgeeti and Ghazal. Sanchita collaborates with Jazz, Spanish Flamenco and Western Classical music as well as in music scores for film and television in the UK. She was a regular artiste on All India Radio. She performs across Europe and America and has been the recipient of several grants from the Arts Council of England.

On January 21st 2012, Sanchita released a CD recording of Thumris entitled Talash. This recording has been made possible with the blessings of Pandit Ajoy Chakrabarty. The recording was launched at Science City, Kolkata, India with the blessings of Pandit Ajoy Chakrabarty and Ustad Zakir Hussain. More information about Sanchita Pal herself can be found on her personal website.

Performing

Sang Gachchhadwang is a traditional Vaidik Mantra Sanskrit chant about unity, sharing and a common purpose.

Hai Ujjala Din is a Bengali song translated into Hindi by Dr Krishna Kumar for Equinox. It is a popular, youthful and inspirational Bengali song promoting the values of friendship and mutual respect. It is a clarion call for everyone to join together and dream of a bright and excellent future.

*In Japan, **Higan** is a one week period surrounding the Spring and Autumn Equinoxes. It celebrates the spiritual move from the world of suffering to the world of enlightenment. The Spring Equinox is spent visiting family graves and holding family reunions.*

Chinese Community Centre Birmingham Wan Cheuk Choir



The Chinese Community Centre Birmingham's Wan Cheuk Choir has been specially formed to take part in Equinox. Wan Cheuk Choir was set up by a group of people who came to the Chinese Community Centre- Birmingham (CCC-B) for various reasons.

Most of them were very keen to sing but having the opportunity to perform at Symphony Hall would be their first experience. At the beginning the group was coached and supported by Josephine Herbert who is one of the Board Directors of CCC-B. The group have developed from a group of individuals to a team of confident members able to perform in front of a large audience. The Wan Cheuk Choir members attend rehearsals on a weekly basis and the group are so committed that they have decided to carry on meeting after the concert in March. Wan Cheuk Choir members would like to thank Martin Willis for inviting CCC-B to take part in the Equinox project and give them the opportunity to realise that they all have the potential and talent to participate in such a unique project.

Performing

Pearl Of The Orient by Lo Ta-yu sings praises to Hong Kong as a symbolic haven from the perils of the Pacific and implores Hong Kong not to lose its Chinese identity in the face of rapid modernisation. Lo Ta-yu's lyrics captured the hearts of a generation, touching on issues of life, attitudes, social responsibility and the political problems of both China and Tibet. Lo Ta-yu is a Taiwanese singer and songwriter who is recognised as a major cultural icon in Taiwan, Hong Kong and China.

Tale Of The City is a modern Taiwanese song by Koo Ka Fai & Yung Ching Kie in 1978.

Gong Xi Gong Xi is a Chinese New Year song. Chinese New Year is the most important of the traditional Chinese holidays and is known as the *Spring Festival*. On New Year's Eve Chinese families gather for their annual reunion dinner. The tradition is to reconcile, forget all grudges and sincerely wish peace and happiness for everyone.

Black Voices



Quietly and gently, informally and gradually, Black Voices was nurtured under the directorship of Carol Pemberton and Bob Ramdhanie. Since 1987, these two friends have steered Black Voices into one of the most solid performance and teaching companies, sharing *a cappella*, primarily from Africa but also throughout the Diaspora. From gospel to spirituals, Caribbean to African, jazz and blues, Black Voices is firmly rooted in music that energises and uplifts, challenges and educates. The company hosted and presented its own *a cappella* series with BBC Radio 2, has performed for radio and television in numerous countries around the world, has produced ten CDs, and has researched, produced, directed and performed in several international collaborations.

Currently, the group operates as a professional collective, researching and rehearsing with five to nine members, but maintaining its tradition of performing as a quintet. The vision of the company has strengthened over the past few years and Black Voices uses its talents in music to: present quality performances; offer stimulating education & singing workshops; address critical issues through developmental programmes nationally & internationally; encourage the development of *a cappella* groups worldwide; nurture and mentor young singers; promote and sustain singing in the oral tradition and establish an annual vocal festival – Vocally BRUM!

Performing

Overture: is from *A Partial History of Black Music* - from *Handel's Messiah: A Soulful Celebration* 1992. It is an overture of mournful expressions of people from different countries, tribes and languages forced together in times of adversity.

Steal Away is a Negro Spiritual telling of the hope to be found in escaping to Jesus the spiritual Saviour in ironic reference to one of the English slave ships- *Jesus of Lubeck*.

*In some
Arabic countries,
Mothers' or Family day
is celebrated on the March
Equinox.*

Town Hall Gospel Choir



The Town Hall Gospel Choir was formed in 2007 when THSH set out to recruit a group of singers from Birmingham's gospel communities to form a choir to participate in the newly refurbished Town Hall's re-opening concert. Initially recruited and trained by Black Voices, the choir has grown to almost 40 members and is now under the directorship of Colin Anderson.

Performing

Sinjenje - We Are What We Are. This piece was composed by Colin Anderson for *Sing For All: Community Spirit 2009*. It is based on Zulu and Xhosa call and response. The song asks us to remember that we are here because of the prayers of our parents and forefathers. How we live and what we leave behind is our choice.



The Vernal Equinox marks the beginning of Nowruz - the Persian New Year. The celebrations which take place in many parts of the world are rooted in the 3,000-year-old tradition of Zoroastrianism and they usually involve elaborate bonfires.

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Birmingham Conservatoire Chinese Group



The Birmingham Conservatoire Chinese Group comprises of singers from China, Taiwan and Malaysia. Coming from various backgrounds, they are singers at postgraduate and undergraduate levels, who have been involved in numerous opera productions, solo recitals and voice ensembles. The group has come together forming an *a capella* ensemble for this performance.

Performing

In Praise Of Eight Horses. This is a Mongolian folk song, depicting the Mongolian green pastures where the war horses roam. It is based on a 13th century Mongol chronicle and refers to the eight chestnut horses of Genghis Khan. It takes place during the Yuan dynasty, when the great Emperor led his army to victory. The galloping of the horses is captured by the voices accompanying the solo tenor. This modern arrangement and translation is by Se Enkhbayar.

*In 325 AD the
Council of Nicaea
decided that the Easter
date would be the first
Sunday after the first full
moon occurring on or after
the March equinox.*

Echo Doliny: The National Polish Folk Choir



The National Polish Folk Choir of Great Britain gave its first performance in 2009 as part of the Polish Folklore Festival at Symphony Hall, Birmingham. Its initial remit was to bring people together from folk ensembles across the country to sing the opening and closing songs of the festival. After much demand, the choir, with its new name Echo Doliny (meaning echo of the valley), was re-formed in January 2011.

Based in Birmingham and conducted by Urszula Weber, the 60-strong choir specialises in choral arrangements of traditional Polish folksongs. Echo Doliny welcomes anyone, young or old, Polish or not, who has a love of singing! In February the choir took part in the triannual Polish Folklore Festival at the Corn Exchange in Cambridge. Also performing at Equinox will be Dolinki (little valleys), a female vocal ensemble made up of members of Echo Doliny.

Performing

Folk music comes from the heart of any community. It explores the main themes of life, from love to war in simple yet beautiful ways.

Dwa Serduszka is a traditional love song sung by Dolinki.

Ruciany Wianek is a medley of wedding songs. Featuring Tim Morgan on solo recorder and Adam Weber singing solo.

Szumi Jawor. This song comes from the Beskid mountain area and is a popular 'prayer' sung by the highlanders. It tells us that all a highlander needs for a good life is work, bread and song. The song uses the traditional 'white voice' style of singing common in the highlands.

The Christian festival of Easter derives its name from ancient Spring celebrations relating to the Goddess Ostara. There are still many Easter symbols relating to new birth.

World Music Youth Choir



The World Music Youth Choir is a new choir with young people between the ages of 6 and 16. It is a non-auditioned choir, based at Grosvenor Studios in Handsworth, Birmingham. The choir, formed by Black Voices, grew out of and is a continuation of its work with Sing Up over the last 3 years.

With this new choir, Black Voices and a range of tutors in world music, work to bring out and enhance the musical skills of the young people and prepare them for performance. WMYC enjoy a range of activities that help to bring out their best, exposing them to a broad range of musical styles, building and expanding their appreciation of music.

Equinox is the first major project for WMYC and an opportunity for the young people to perform at Birmingham's most prestigious venue, Symphony Hall.

Performing

The Lioness Hunt by Lebohang Morake is from the highly successful musical *The Lion King*. The lyrics are in Zulu.

The Holi festival is celebrated throughout India with immense joy and enthusiasm. The festival has many purposes but principally it celebrates the beginning of the new season of Spring.



Fieshah Amlak



Fieshah Amlak aims to promote, develop and sustain ideas and initiatives to advance African and Caribbean Music (Drumming & Percussion) through the use of workshops, discussions, demonstration, performances in both the formal education and community networks.

Fieshah Amlak has been performing and teaching aspects of traditional and secular African/ Caribbean folk forms of music since 1980 through the medium of drumming and percussion. He has developed his skills and expertise as a Performer, Workshop Organiser, Facilitator, Musician and Music Consultant and he has worked both nationally and internationally.

He has been involved in the organization and delivery of workshops and residencies in Rotterdam, Amsterdam 1986, Harare/Bulawayo-Zimbabwe-1993, Addis Ababa-Ethiopia 1993/1994, Leipzig Germany-1994/1997 Cologne-Germany 1994, Johannesburg, Soweto, Pretoria, Giyani-South Africa-1995, Belo Horizonte-Brazil 1995 as well performing and teaching over an 18 year period for the Kokuma Dance Theatre. He was also involved in workshops, performances and pre/post show talks for the RSC between 1991 and 2001 and was the Royal Drummer in Orinoko. He has taught extensively throughout the United Kingdom since 1980 to the present. He has conducted workshops and residencies for Cheshire Drama Services since 1987 and was part of a team of artists who taught in South Africa in 1995.

It is an ancient Chinese custom to balance eggs, a symbol of fertility, on the day of the March equinox to bring good luck and prosperity.

Birmingham Schools' Percussion Ensemble



Birmingham Schools' Percussion Ensemble is directed by Victoria Lee. Members have the opportunity to play specialised repertoire, enabling them to learn extended techniques on a wide variety of instruments, including marimba, vibraphone, orchestral and ethnic percussion. The ensemble gives several public performances each year and entry level is approximately Grade 4.

Birmingham Schools' Azaad Dhol Group



Birmingham Schools' Azaad Dhol Group is directed by Harjit Singh and caters for Intermediate to Advanced level players of Dhol, Bhangra and Folk music. The instruments played in the group are dhol, tabla, dholak, harmonium, tumbi, chimta and bhangra. They have performed locally and nationally all over the UK; also they have appeared on Howard Goodall's music series on Channel 4 and took part in the successful Guinness World Record attempt in May 2009 when 632 dhol drummers played together. The group seeks musicians in the age range of 10yrs to 18yrs – girls and boys – with some experience in one of the above instruments or dance.

Acknowledgements

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Arts Council England

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Christopher Long

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Equinox Project Team: Martin Willis (Director), John Barber, Vicky Wilcher, Gwyn Williams, Naomi Green, Colin Hutcheson and John Ellis

Equinox Partner Leaders: Anna Yim, Anne Ellis, Carol Pemberton, Colin Anderson, Harjit Singh, Haroon Bashir, Nicky Reid, Richard Weber, Sanchita Pal, Sue Ward, Ula Weber, Vicky Lee, Yi Ling Chaing

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We are grateful to Symphony Hall Management and all the participating groups for giving their permission for this concert to be recorded.

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