



## **Recording the Easter Oratorio**

### **Paul Spicer**

It is always a composer's dream to get a major work recorded. This is not just an exercise in vanity, but is the means by which many more people can get to hear the piece and then, hopefully, to perform it. This Oratorio has surprised me in attracting more attention than I ever thought was possible when I wrote it. Part of this, of course, is due to the celebrity of the librettist, Tom Wright, now Bishop of Durham, whose world-wide reputation has ensured people's interest in this, his only libretto.

The work took me nearly two years to write altogether, and it is wonderful after such a labour to see it getting performances and, after a great deal of effort and fund raising, this recording. The performances which the Birmingham Bach Choir gave in Birmingham and Durham Cathedrals recently were wonderfully committed and inspiring occasions. Durham Cathedral, especially, one of the greatest buildings in the country, was a remarkable setting and suited the size and scale of the work so much better than the more confined spaces of Birmingham's cathedral. The performance was also beautifully set up by James Lancelot, the cathedral organist, in his introductory remarks. It is a shame that lack of funds at that stage prevented us from going straight on to record the work. This means that there will be a short period of revision for the choir before the sessions take place at the very end of September.

The venue for the recording is the beautiful chapel of Hawksyard Priory at Armitage, near Lichfield. This disused Catholic monastery is now an old people's home. The magnificent chapel is being maintained but is barely used. It has a lovely acoustic and the organ case is from the 18<sup>th</sup> century 'Father' Smith organ in Eton College Chapel. It was purchased by Josiah Spode (in the grounds of whose house the Priory was built) when the College commissioned J L Pearson to design a new organ case for a different position in the chapel. Originally on a gallery in Spode's house, after his death the organ was moved to the chapel when it was built.

The recording will take four days to complete with different elements being completed on each day. Starting with modest orchestral forces and soloists, it will move on Saturday to recording the choral movements. Finally, on Sunday, the Lichfield Cathedral choristers will join and the Lichfield Cathedral Special Choir will be the 'congregation' for the Easter hymns. It is marvellous that we are keeping the Lichfield connection in this way as the work was written in part to celebrate the 1300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the cathedral in AD700 by St Chad.



Full details of the recording will be advertised when it is available.

The forces involved are:

Rachel Nicholls (soprano)  
Nathan Vale (tenor)  
Sean Clayton (Evangelist)  
Jonathan Gunthorpe (bass)  
Lichfield Cathedral Choristers  
Lichfield Cathedral Special Choir  
Birmingham Bach Choir  
English Symphony Orchestra  
Conducted by Paul Spicer