

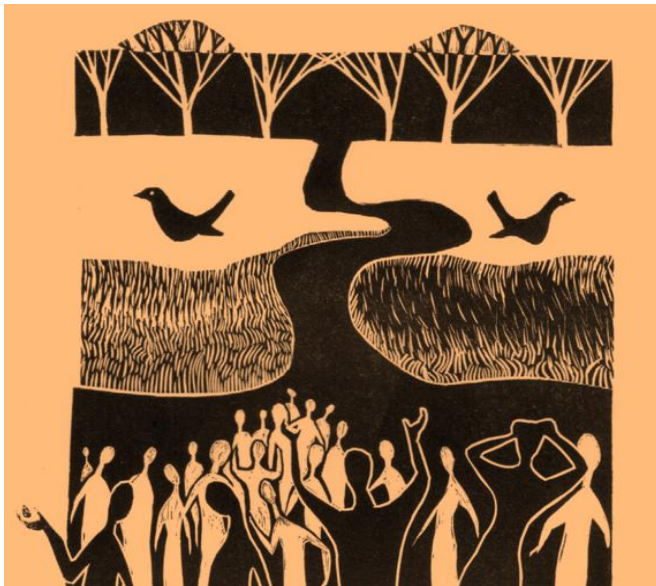
ANGRY PLANET



This booklet celebrates the world premiere of the **Angry Planet** performed in the Albert Hall during the 2012 Proms.

Angry Planet was commissioned by David Hill, conductor of the BBC Singers and musical director of the Bach Choir, who approached Bob Chilcott, described by the Observer as 'a contemporary hero of British Choral Music', who in turn approached the award winning poet Charles Bennett to write the libretto.

Angry Planet was turned into book form for the Hawthorn Press and Diane Griffiths produced the series of engravings to illustrate it.



BOB CHILCOTT

Described by the Observer as “a contemporary hero of British Choral Music”, Bob Chilcott works tirelessly as a composer and choral conductor. He has over 125 pieces published by Oxford University Press, two acclaimed recordings on Signum, *Making Waves* (The Sirens) and *Man I Sing* (BBC Singers), and he wrote the title tracks for the King's Singers' albums, *Swimming over London* and *High Flight*. His *Irish Blessing* featured on the multi-platinum debut album of The Priests in 2008. In March 2012 his *Requiem* was released on Hyperion, performed by Wells Cathedral Choir and the Nash Ensemble, conducted by Matthew Owens, and in November two complete discs of his music will appear, one by the BBC Choir of the Year, the Wellensian Consort, and the other, on Signum, on which he conducts the Wroclaw Philharmonic Choir.

In 2002 he was appointed Principal Guest Conductor of the BBC's acclaimed professional choir, the BBC Singers, and he has conducted other distinguished choirs including RIAS Kammerchor, Vancouver Chamber Choir, Jauna Musika, The World Youth Choir, Tower New Zealand Youth Choir, Taipei Chamber Singers, Wroclaw Philharmonic Choir, and the Kyoto Echo Choir. Since 1997 he has conducted in 23 countries, and in 2012 he has invitations to conduct in Poland, Denmark, Spain, Germany, China, Japan, USA, and Canada.

Chilcott maintains a busy schedule of commissions. Amongst shorter carols and anthems, 2013 will see the completion of an hour-long setting of the St John Passion for Wells Cathedral for SATB choir, soloists, and instruments, and *Five Days that Changed the World*, a 20-minute work setting words by Charles Bennett for youth choirs, piano and tympani, which will be premiered in Worcester Cathedral as part of the Worcester International Festival for Young Singers in July 2013.

CHARLES BENNETT

Charles Bennett is a celebrated, award-winning poet whose work has been published to wide acclaim in the UK, Europe and America. He was born in the North West of England and was a mature student in the 1980s at London University and the University of Massachusetts, where he was mentored by Nobel Laureate Joseph Brodsky. Following the completion of a doctorate on the structure of meaning in Seamus Heaney's sequences, he taught English and Drama for several years before becoming the first Director of Ledbury Poetry Festival, which he established and ran for a number of highly-successful years before pursuing an academic career. He is currently Reader in Poetry at the University of Northampton where he leads the BA in Creative Writing. In addition to continuing his collaboration with Bob Chilcott, he is currently working on a non-fiction book set in North Norfolk.

Charles has published eight books of poetry to date. His engaging second full-length collection, *How to Make a Woman Out of Water*, appeared with Enitharmon in 2007. His poems have been reviewed by Frieda Hughes in *The Times* and have featured in over 150 poetry magazines including the *Times Literary Supplement*. His most recent book "*Evenlode*", has been published by Overstep Books. The Poetry Book Society have said that Charles' poetry is 'brimming over with startling voices, arresting images and an indefatigable joie de vivre.'



THE BACH CHOIR

The Prom was the climax of the first two years of the Bach Choir's Outreach project, a climax almost unimaginable in 2010 when a few volunteers from the Choir made their tentative approaches to schools in the relatively deprived parts of Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea.

It was a huge undertaking. The Bach Choir has more than 200 members. The National Youth Choir has some 180. The BBC Singers, the professional group also conducted by David Hill, are 30 and it was hoped that about 200 children from the schools involved in the Outreach programme would take part.

In the end there were well over 500 voices, including children from the London borough of Harrow who are part of the BBC Singer's Outreach project.

There was also a signing choir from Great Baddow High School and an interpreter, Dr Paul Whittaker, founder of the Huddersfield charity Music and the Deaf. This is believed to be the first appearance of a signing choir at the Proms.

This project was run in collaboration with the Voices Foundation, which aims to share the joy of choral singing with children who may not have grown up with it, as most Bach Choir members have done, and also to spread awareness of the choir more widely. The Voices foundation has supported training for the classroom teachers, and choir members have gone into the schools alongside the music staff to lead workshops, sing and play accompaniments. Children have had the opportunity to

attend Bach Choir rehearsals. The results have gone far beyond David Hill's original expectations, with benefits not just to the children but for the adult singers who have encountered unfamiliar repertoire and found themselves thinking in a completely new way about the process of musical learning and performance. In the words of one Bach Choir Soprano, "*It's been thrilling.*"

Videos about the Bach Choir's outreach work and the development of the *Angry Planet* can be found on the choir's website

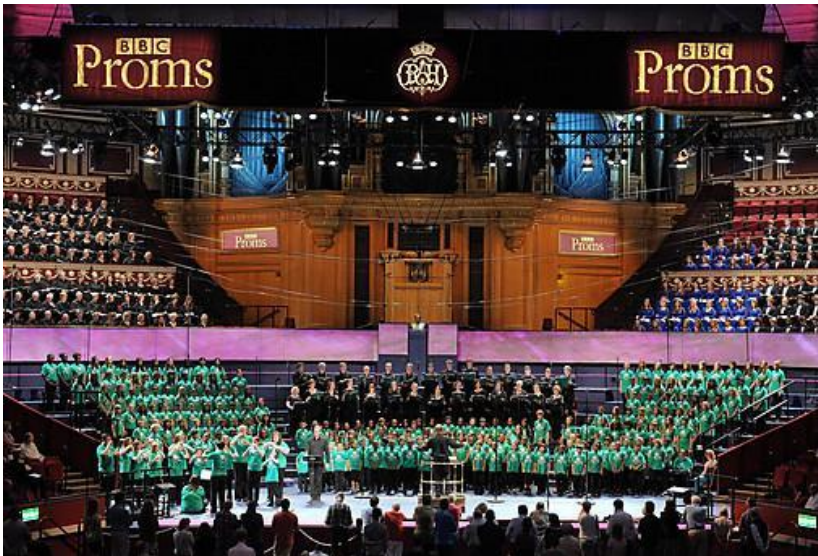
www.thebachchoir.or.uk





During the rehearsal period all those involved were enriched and excited by the interchange of experience and ideas.





2012 Prom at the Royal Albert Hall



The Bach Choir



"I felt really happy when everyone was clapping at the end. I enjoyed it because it brought happiness to the crowd."

The words of one of the children who sang in the Angry Planet Prom.

The Guardian review spoke of *"Bob Chilcott's finely crafted choral writing"* and others were impressed by the scale and complexity of the project, but perhaps more important were the reactions of members of the Bach Choir, the children themselves, their teachers and parents, and others in the audience:

"What a triumph for the Bach Choir! The huge amount of work undertaken by the Outreach Team and the incredible logistics involved in bringing such numbers to the platform were breath-taking. The children all, clearly, thoroughly enjoyed themselves. We met lots of parents in the auditorium who were bursting with pride. Big smiles all around."

A member of the audience.

"Magic ending when all the children signed THE WORLD."

"I thought it was a truly wonderful concert. The power of the voices of children and professionals as well as the beautiful signing combined with the wonderful music and words made it a fantastic event."

Members of the Bach Choir.

"The children realised how they were an important integral part of the work, performing alongside 'experts'. They consequently felt very proud of their part in it."

A teacher.

"It was really exciting. She's been dreaming about this for weeks."

A parent.

"A once in a lifetime experience. Not everyone can say they have sung in the Royal Albert Hall."

A child.

DIANE GRIFFITHS

As with so many artists working in all disciplines I find it both challenging and refreshing to work with artists in other fields. These comings-together can often extend one's own practice as well as resulting in dynamic and exciting work, especially when one is taken out of one's own comfort zone.

I have had previous experience of collaborations both when working as an Artist in Residence with Poetry- next-the- Sea and being involved on a project with the Britten Sinfonia. I am particularly drawn to the work of the poet Charles Bennett. In my work as a maker of Artist Books I had already worked with Charles, producing a concertina version of his poem series "365 Apples".



And a small-fold out hand painted book of "A Year Underwater".



ANGRY PLANET – the Text

Charles Bennett developed the text for *Angry Planet* in three thematic units which guide the levels of meaning in the piece as a whole. Here follows an excerpt from his commentary in the Hawthorn Press Book:

The first thematic sequence, which was my original concept for the piece, consists of poems timed for particular hours. Very early on I knew I wanted to provide a bridging structure of five pieces with a keystone in the middle and a balance at either end. I also wanted to work through towards a moment of potential uplift, and so I began with the notion of night-hours, and my own working title was 'Six-Twelve-Six'. At one level I wanted to play with the idea of a book of hours, and so I had in mind the canonical hours of Matins, Lauds, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline. My version concerns what might be called stations of the night, beginning with 6pm as a kind of evensong moment which launches the whole trajectory of the piece. The times are worked through in three-hourly equal segments – 6pm, 9pm, Midnight, 3am and 6am. In each one an anonymous narrator experiences a dreamt encounter with a creature and hears it speak. The idea of the dream vision came from my reading of mediaeval poems such as Piers Ploughman, and my Everyman narrator also owes something to similar texts. The main narrative voice is broken and interrupted with italic sections which take the form of dramatic monologues from a non-human perspective – giving me the chance to present critical aspects of relationships with our fellow animals in a voice other than my own. Putting on a mask in this way is a kind of liberation. It also enlivens the poem with another layer of voice. In the words of the creatures we see most clearly aspects of bewilderment, sorrow, regret, distaste and contempt which I wanted to present on their behalf. Originally I had thought to include a variety of all the animal kingdoms: reptiles, birds, invertebrates, fish and amphibians, but in the end, although the slowworm represents reptiles and the corncrake birds, the remaining three creatures are all mammals.

The second level of writing runs counter to the first and uses the plant kingdom as its basis. I wanted to consider living things which exist independently of humans, and are therefore not threatened by us in the way that so many other creatures are. In the end I wrote poems voiced for weeds, as I have always admired their success and dominance. These weed poems were meant as celebratory, and the tone has a slight swagger to it, as the plants glory in their ancient lineage (compared with them we have only just arrived) and practically unlimited future. In the last stanza of each poem they address us directly, mocking our arrogance, confident in their superiority and ability to outlast us. It was perhaps the mischievous, almost roughish manner of their playful tone which led me to present them as a modern equivalent of Anglo-Saxon riddles – and this gave rise to their impish titles. I knew too that these poems needed to be allocated to the children's choir in the piece, and so I wanted to give them something naughty to sing, removed from the more adult and darker sections of the sequence.

The final level in the piece is perhaps the darkest: four bitter songs which focus on human exploitation, wilful destruction and cynical defilement of the planet for quick profit regardless of consequences. There is a more directly political aspect to these poems, and I employ the second person and a more general, inclusive perspective. In these bitter songs the tree of England has been cut down and sold, a second Deluge has drowned the United Kingdom and Ireland, a forest is slashed and burnt, and though one piece acts as a kind of confession, there is no possibility of forgiveness. We are 'sorry too late, as always.' Sadly, one of these pieces seemed uncomfortably prescient, as soon after it was completed the Japanese tsunami of March 2011 occurred.

Looking at it now as a whole, at the end of the creative process, I realise I have written a piece which is not so much concerned with the anger of the planet as our custody of its wonders.

ANGRY PLANET – the illustrations

In responding to Charles' text for *Angry Planet*, it was important to me not just to refer to the direct imagery itself but crucial to capture something of the theme and of the mood of the concept.

This led to my first decision: to use the traditional medium of wood engraving. This seemed appropriate on several levels: engraved images are made powerful and graphic by the means of their execution and lend themselves strongly to monochrome illustrations which sit happily with text. Secondly the process of engraving itself seemed particularly fitting as the marks are made by cutting into wood – symbolic of the destruction of so many of the planet's trees. Thirdly to produce an engraving one must slow oneself down to the constraints and demands of the 'cutting'. Each mark made is absolute and cannot be altered. The process itself becomes one almost of meditation; perhaps the state of mind we need to not only appreciate the consequences of the changes we are making to the planet but to give ourselves a quiet resolve to act.

In following the text I tried to follow the events with Charles through the night, with its nightmares and imaginings to day break and hope. The final image 'Equinox' leads us back to the beginning and to the idea of a new Spring.

A fresh start if only we choose to make it.

Sample page from the Hawthorn Press book

The Flood

Remember those islands
those islands the waves washed over?
Where were they exactly,

who lived there
and what were they like?
It's water under the bridge.

It's water over our heads.
It's a land that's drowned forever.
If only we had a raven,

we could send him out
until he came back with an oak leaf.
If only we had a dove.



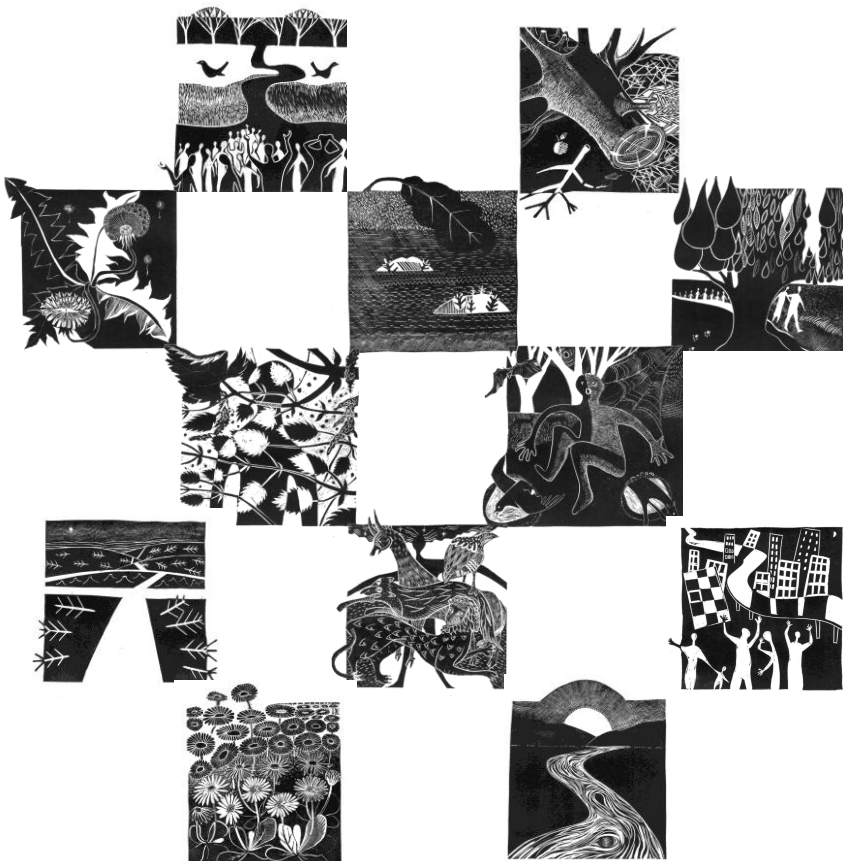


WHAT NEXT...

All the artists, performers and organisations in this project have both a history and a future working with other groups and with other disciplines.

Charles Bennett and Bob Chilcott are presently engaged together on *Five Days that Changed the World* which will receive its world premiere at Worcester Cathedral on July 26th 2013.

Further details can be found at www.sing.org/wifys



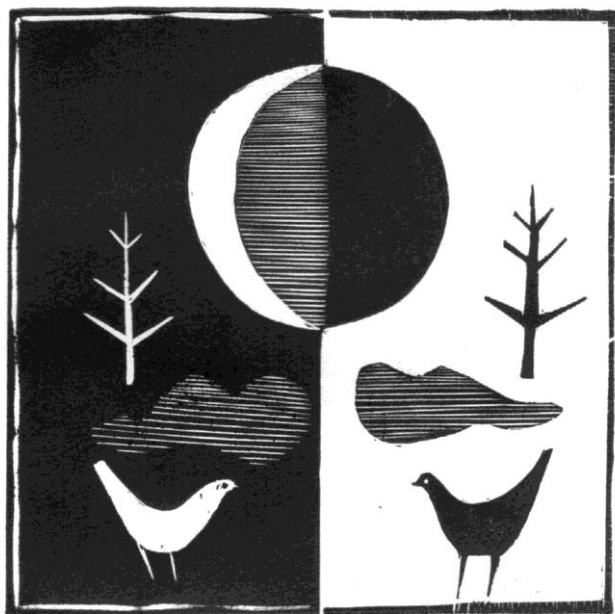
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Designed by Diane Griffiths 2013