



Photo: Thousand Word Media



Photo: John Bellars

Composer Profile: Bob Chilcott

Described by The Observer, as “A contemporary hero of British choral music”, Bob Chilcott has enjoyed a lifelong association with choral music as an institutionally renowned composer, conductor and singer with a prolific output of works, performed worldwide.

Bob Chilcott’s affinity with music grew from his time as a young chorister, then choral scholar in the choir of King’s College, Cambridge, and for 12 years as a member of the King’s Singers. He became a full-time composer in 1997, embracing his career with energy and commitment and has produced a large catalogue of music, for all types of choirs, published by OUP.

His music for Christmas forms a considerable part of his most popular repertoire, setting both new and traditional texts in his carols, and writing for mixed-voice and upper-voice choirs. Among his multitude of works, community-based projects, pieces for children, and a significant amount of music for the church, Bob is also renowned for A Little Jazz Mass, Requiem, and St. John Passion.

He has written large-scale works, including The Angry Planet, commissioned by the BBC Proms in 2012. And, in 2013, The King Shall Rejoice, commissioned by Westminster Abbey to celebrate the Queen’s 60th Anniversary of her Coronation.

Bob’s music has been widely recorded by leading British choirs and groups including the King’s Singers, The Sixteen, Tenebrae, The Bach Choir, BBC Singers, Houston Chamber Choir and Wroclaw Philharmonic Choir.

In 2016 he collaborated with Katie Melua on her album In Winter, and in 2017 with Choralis, to release In Winter’s Arms, and also with Commotio, to release his album of jazz infused choral works, All Good Things.

Bob was invited to write the Raymond Brock Memorial Commission for the ACDA National Conference in Dallas in 2021: Collaborating with poet Delphine Chalmers, Songs My Heart Has Taught Me explores and embraces themes of identity, diversity, inclusivity, unity and commonality.

For 7 years Bob was conductor of the Chorus of The Royal College of Music. He has been Principal Guest Conductor of the BBC Singers since 2002. In 2017 he was awarded an Honorary Fellowship by the Royal School of Church Music and in 2019 took up the role of Principal Conductor with Birmingham University Singers. In Autumn 2020, Bob was appointed Musician-in-Residence at Downe House School.

Working with choirs in more than 30 countries around the world, Bob Chilcott inspires all age groups. He works annually as an adjudicator and conductor at choir festivals and with many thousands of amateur singers across the UK in a continuing series of Singing Days.

Composer's Notes: Songs my Heart has Taught Me

OXFORD

Secular
SATB and piano

Songs my Heart has Taught Me

vocal score

Bob Chilcott



“Throughout life, music has been my barometer; it has helped me to understand so many things and so many people, and I hold this deep in my heart.”

It was a privilege and an honour to be invited to write the Raymond Brock Memorial Commission for the ACDA National Conference in Dallas in 2021. I was asked to write something that embraced certain aspects of diversity: a rich, beautiful, and complex subject. I asked a brilliant young poet, Delphine Chalmers, to come on this journey with me to create this piece. As the National Conference ended up taking place virtually, this piece was first performed by the BBC Singers with pianist Anna Tilbrook, in a video recording to be broadcast to delegates.

I have learnt so much from a life of extensive travel, through music and collaboration with many different people, but the overriding thing is that, as Maya Angelou says in her great poem 'Human Family', 'We are more alike, my friends, than we are unlike'. Throughout life, music has been my barometer; it has helped me to understand so many things and so many people, and I hold this deep in my heart, hence the title *Songs my Heart has Taught Me*. Delphine and I decided to use musical concepts as titles for the four songs that make up the work, exploring how these can help us to understand commonality.

The first song, 'Unison', is an anthem to unity that ends with the powerful line, 'The song of the future and the song of our souls are in unison'. 'Harmony', written in a more fluid, musical-theatre style, touches on peoples need to be accepted, in a way like a note in a chord, in such a way that we can feel embraced, as Delphine writes so eloquently: 'In the song of shared acceptance lies an inner harmony'. The third song, 'Rhythm', is a spiky piece with a beat that tells of life's rhythm, of the pulse that the living all share, and it urges us to seize the day. Finally, in 'Resolution', the melody is spun by the singers over a simple, recurring chord structure. The poetic refrain is strongly influenced by the words of the 14th-century female mystic, Julian of Norwich: 'All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well'. The piece ends quietly and tonally, but of course does not completely resolve. That is the story of life.

Duration: c.11 minutes

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