

NANTWICH CHORAL SOCIETY

Come and Sing

SAMUEL COLERIDGE-TAYLOR'S

Hiawatha's Wedding Feast

William Smith - Tenor

Simon Russell - Piano

John Naylor - Conductor

St Mary's Church, Nantwich

Saturday 3 February 2018 5.30 pm

On behalf of Nantwich Choral Society I would like to welcome you to our concert. The choir, now in its 45th season, began its life as an evening class but rapidly took on a life of its own and has become one of the most accomplished and well-regarded choirs in the North West of England. For the last eleven years we have been fortunate to have the inspirational John Naylor as our Music Director and we are also fortunate to have the services of a fine accompanist, Simon Russell.

This evening's concert is the product of one of our annual 'Come and Sing' events where singers from other choirs in the local area, and indeed sometimes much further afield, join with us to work on a piece during the day, which we then perform in the evening. These events are part of the choir's more educational strand of activities, but they are also great fun, albeit hard work, and give the participants the opportunity to revisit a favourite work or sample one which is new to them.

Hiawatha's Wedding Feast was last performed by NCS in March 2014 at one of our regular concerts. Once one of the most frequently performed pieces in the choral repertoire (often in costume), *Hiawatha* went out of fashion for several decades. Older generations of singers may recall singing or hearing the piece in their childhood or young adulthood, but then interest dwindled. Consequently younger generations of both singers and audiences may have had little chance to get to know this very engaging work, and today's event gives them that opportunity.

This opportunity comes, however, at a price, like all our events and concerts. We wish to acknowledge our gratitude for the legacies, sponsorships, gifts, grants and donations which help us maintain and develop our musical standards. Recently we have received grants from Cheshire East and Nantwich Town Council, and we are very grateful for ongoing support from the Harding Trust. Without the generosity of these bodies and others it would not be possible for our choral society to put on concerts of a high standard, using professional soloists and orchestral players as required. I hope you, the audience, will enjoy tonight's concert as much as we will enjoy performing it for you.

Kay Foster

Chairman

Acknowledgement

The music for this performance is supplied by Cheshire libraries.

COMMENTARY

SAMUEL COLERIDGE-TAYLOR (1875-1912)

Hiawatha's Wedding Feast, Op.30 No.1

Edward Elgar was invited to write a work for the Three Choirs Festival in 1898. He demurred, and referred Herbert Brewer, the Gloucester Cathedral organist to Coleridge-Taylor as "far and away the cleverest fellow amongst the younger men." The mutual editor at Novello of both the two composers was Augustus Jaeger, who told Elgar that Coleridge-Taylor was a 'genius'.

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was the son of a West African doctor who had married an English girl. However the reluctance of Croydon patients to patronise the black Dr Taylor's practice resulted in its financial failure and he returned to Sierra Leone, leaving his wife and child behind. Samuel's grandfather discovered and fostered the child's musical talent which was developed by his uncle and the patronage of local musicians. His church choirmaster generously paid for him to study at the Royal College of Music in 1890, first as a violinist and pianist and then as a composer under Charles Villiers Stanford.

The result of Elgar's recommendation was the *Ballade in A minor* which Coleridge-Taylor conducted himself at Gloucester and shortly afterwards at Crystal Palace; these performances greatly enhanced his reputation as one of the coming men. Still aged only 23, his next composition was *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*.

Longfellow wrote *The Song of Hiawatha* in trochaic tetrameter, the same metre as the Finnish epic *Kalevala* which he had learned during a Scandinavian stay in 1835. It purports to tell the story of some of the indigenous North American Indians, but whilst it incorporates strands of folk lore, the content is probably more a product of Longfellow's imagination than historical accuracy. Nevertheless, the poem became immensely popular and tens of thousands of copies were sold. Coleridge-Taylor is said to have been attracted to the text of *Hiawatha* by the strangeness and euphony of the Indian names and words. Like his hero Dvorák, he was clearly interested in the culture of the native Americans, an ethnic interest which later extended to a mission on behalf of the music of the black people of America and Africa.

The first performance, conducted by Stanford, was given on November 11th 1898 in a temporary concert hall at the RCM known as the 'Tin Tabernacle'. Word went round that something special was afoot and there was tremendous demand for tickets: many were disappointed, although room was found for Sir Arthur Sullivan and Sir Hubert Parry. The packed audience witnessed a first performance which Parry later described as "one of

the most remarkable events in modern English musical history. *Hiawatha* started in a career which established it as one of the most beloved works of modern English music.”

Now - some 106 years after the composer’s death - it is difficult to believe that *Hiawatha’s Wedding Feast* was once as popular with British choral societies as *Elijah*, second only in that respect to *Messiah*. Its success after its sensational first performance in 1888 was such that Coleridge-Taylor was persuaded to write two more choral works on the same theme, *The Death of Minnehaha* in 1899 and *Hiawatha’s Departure* in 1900, together with a *Song of Hiawatha* Overture. Although the two sequel cantatas proved less popular than *Hiawatha’s Wedding Feast*, they were prominent in the repertoire until the beginning of the Second World War. Indeed, between 1928 and 1939 all three of them were performed annually in a spectacular ballet version at the Royal Albert Hall with a huge chorus and as many as 200 dancers. The first ballet performance was conducted in 1924 by the composer’s son, Hiawatha Coleridge-Taylor. Malcolm Sargent regularly conducted *Hiawatha* festivals in the Royal Albert Hall full of singers dressed up in their own Indian costumes until war brought such performances to an end.

The text falls into one of the time honoured structure of speech making: Tell them what you’re going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you’ve told them!

1. You shall hear how Pau-Puk-Keewis

In the bouncing trochaic rhythms of Longfellow’s verse (a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed) the chorus introduces the celebrated entertainers of the guests at the wedding feast. These are Pau-Puk-Keewis the dancer, Chibiabos the singer and Iagoo the story-teller. All three names are uttered on the rising fifth which opens the work on flute and trumpet in the orchestrated accompaniment and which is one of the principal motifs, along with the primitive rhythms emphasised by drum strokes used by the composer to set his exotic scene.

The “gracious Hiawatha” and his bride the “lovely Laughing Water” (Minnehaha), are mentioned at the beginning but without the distinctive rising fifth: strangely, they are almost ignored by both poet and composer at their own wedding and receive no particular attention. Behind the whole proceedings is Nokomis, Hiawatha’s grandmother who is responsible for the wedding feast: she even catches the pike before cooking it!

2. Then the handsome Pau-Puk-Keewis

The character who is given the most attention is Pau-Puk-Keewis, the central figure of the next three sections. Calling on him to dance for them, the chorus introduces him as “the handsome Pau-Puk-Keewis”, applying the ritual rising fifth.

3. He was dress'd in shirt of doe-skin

After a change of metre from the hitherto prevailing 4/4 to a lilting 6/8, sopranos and altos open the description of his colourful appearance and his extravagant clothing. He doesn't care that the warriors despise him as an idler, gambler and coward because all the women love him.

4. First he danc'd a solemn measure

Then his "mystic dance" begins in 3/4 time, slowly at first, as recounted by basses and tenors, but then getting gradually quicker until the climactic point at which he creates a whirlwind. The accompaniment prolongs the excitement before the tempo broadens and Pau-Puk-Keewis grandly sits down.

5. Then said they to Chibiabos

A handsome recall of material from the opening of the work leads to the next section in which the chorus, urge Chibiabos to sing for them.

6. Onaway! Awake, beloved!

After a gentle introduction Chibiabos sings "Onaway! Awake, Beloved", tenderly extolling the virtues of Minnehaha, Hiawatha's bride. This aria was once so popular that every tenor had to have it in his repertoire. Resourcefully sustained by sensitively accomplished changes of harmony, it is certainly an exceptional lyrical inspiration.

7. Thus the gentle Chibiabos

The following choral section, "Thus the gentle Chibiabos", picks up the story again as a transition to the following section.

8. Very boastful was lagoo

This is a many-sided choral characterisation of the "old and ugly" lagoo, a friend of Nokomis and a great boaster. An entry (allocated to a bassoon in the orchestral accompaniment) indicates on a mention of "his immeasurable falsehoods" is not without comedy and it progresses with brightly orchestrated joy in his legendary boastfulness. He brags that no one ran faster, no one was a better hunter: but he did carve Hiawatha's cradle and taught him to make his first bow.

However, apart from a mention of Osseo the magician we do not get to hear his story, since the accompaniment has already made a grandly *fff* reference back to the opening of the work, suggesting that the feast is near its end.

9. Such was Hiawatha's wedding

This the closing chorus: the guests depart, leaving Hiawatha happy with his bride and the work ends with a 24 bar postlude starting pianissimo and ending with a mighty climax, making a last recall of the opening bars with rising fifths as before.

Coleridge-Taylor became an overnight sensation after the premiere of this work. He produced a huge number of compositions, but the fees were low, the royalty system didn't exist, and he had to work prodigiously hard to support his family. He composed, conducted, adjudicated, taught and travelled extensively in the UK, North America and in Europe. Sadly, like Mendelssohn before him, he died at an early age (37) worn out by over-work after succumbing to pneumonia.

Hiawatha's Wedding Feast sold hundreds of thousands of copies, but Coleridge-Taylor had no conception of how successful it would become, as he had sold it outright for the sum of 15 guineas. After his early death in 1912, the fact that he and his family received no royalties from what was one of the most successful and popular works written in the previous 50 years led in part to the formation of the Performing Rights Society. His widow received a pension £100 from King George V.

He was buried at Wallington in Surrey. His grave was recently visited by Michael Portillo in his recent 'Great Railway Journeys' television programme. The inscription on the fine carved headstone includes a quotation from the composition *Hiawatha*, and words written by his close friend, the poet Alfred Noyes:

Too young to die his great simplicity is happy courage in an alien world his gentleness made all that knew him love him.

HIAWATHA'S WEDDING-FEAST - TEXT

You shall hear how Pau-Puk-Keewis,
How the handsome Yenadizze
Danced at Hiawatha's wedding;
How the gentle Chibiabos,
He the sweetest of musicians,
Sang his songs of love and longing;
How Iagoo, the great boaster,
He the marvellous story-teller,
Told his tales of strange adventure,
That the feast might be more joyous,

That the time might pass more gayly,
And the guests be more contented.

Sumptuous was the feast Nokomis
Made at Hiawatha's wedding;
All the bowls were made of bass-wood,
White and polished very smoothly,
All the spoons of horn of bison,
Black and polished very smoothly.
She had sent through all the village

Messengers with wands of willow,
As a sign of invitation,
As a token of the feasting;
And the wedding guests assembled,
Clad in all their richest raiment,
Robes of fur and belts of wampum,
Splendid with their paint and plumage,
Beautiful with beads and tassels.

First they ate the sturgeon, Nahma,
And the pike, the Maskenozha,
Caught and cooked by old Nokomis;
Then on pemican they feasted,
Pemican and buffalo marrow,
Haunch of deer and hump of bison,
Yellow cakes of the Mondamin,
And the wild rice of the river.
But the gracious Hiawatha,
And the lovely Laughing Water,
And the careful old Nokomis,
Tasted not the food before them,
Only waited on the others,
Only served their guests in silence.

And when all the guests had finished,
Old Nokomis, brisk and busy,
From an ample pouch of otter,
Filled the red stone pipes for smoking
With tobacco from the South-land,
Mixed with bark of the red willow,
And with herbs and leaves of fragrance.
Then she said, "O Pau-Puk-Keewis,
Dance for us your merry dances,
Dance the Beggar's Dance to please us,
That the feast may be more joyous,
That the time may pass more gayly,
And our guests be more contented!"

Then the handsome Pau-Puk-Keewis,
He the idle Yenadizze,
He the merry mischief-maker,
Whom the people called the Storm-Fool,
Rose among the guests assembled.
Skilled was he in sports and pastimes,

In the merry dance of snow-shoes,
In the play of quoits and ball-play;
Skilled was he in games of hazard,
In all games of skill and hazard,
Pugasaing, the Bowl and Counters,
Kuntassoo, the Game of Plum-stones.
Though the warriors called him Faint-Heart,
Called him coward, Shaugodaya,
Idler, gambler, Yenadizze,
Little heeded he their jesting,
Little cared he for their insults,
For the women and the maidens
Loved the handsome Pau-Puk-Keewis.

He was dressed in shirt of doe-skin,
White and soft, and fringed with ermine,
All inwrought with beads of wampum;
He was dressed in deer-skin leggings,
Fringed with hedgehog quills and ermine,
And in moccasins of buck-skin,
Thick with quills and beads embroidered.
On his head were plumes of swan's down,
On his heels were tails of foxes,
In one hand a fan of feathers,
And a pipe was in the other.
Barred with streaks of red and yellow,
Streaks of blue and bright vermilion,
Shone the face of Pau-Puk-Keewis.
From his forehead fell his tresses,
Smooth, and parted like a woman's,
Shining bright with oil, and plaited,
Hung with braids of scented grasses,
As among the guests assembled,
To the sound of flutes and singing,
To the sound of drums and voices,
Rose the handsome Pau-Puk-Keewis,
And began his mystic dances.

First he danced a solemn measure,
Very slow in step and gesture,
In and out among the pine-trees,
Through the shadows and the sunshine,
Treading softly like a panther.

Then more swiftly and still swifter,
Whirling, spinning round in circles,
Leaping o'er the guests assembled,
Eddying round and round the wigwam,
Till the leaves went whirling with him,
Till the dust and wind together
Swept in eddies round about him.
Then along the sandy margin
Of the lake, the Big-Sea-Water,
On he sped with frenzied gestures,
Stamped upon the sand, and tossed it
Wildly in the air around him;
Till the wind became a whirlwind,
Till the sand was blown and sifted
Like great snowdrifts o'er the landscape,
Heaping all the shores with Sand Dunes,
Sand Hills of the Nagow Wudjoo!

Thus the merry Pau-Puk-Keewis
Danced his Beggar's Dance to please
them,
And, returning, sat down laughing
There among the guests assembled,
Sat and fanned himself serenely
With his fan of turkey-feathers.

Then they said to Chibiabos,
To the friend of Hiawatha,
To the sweetest of all singers,
To the best of all musicians,
"Sing to us, O Chibiabos!
Songs of love and songs of longing,
That the feast may be more joyous,
That the time may pass more gayly,
And our guests be more contented!"

And the gentle Chibiabos
Sang in accents sweet and tender,
Sang in tones of deep emotion,
Songs of love and songs of longing;
Looking still at Hiawatha,
Looking at fair Laughing Water,
Sang he softly, sang in this wise:

"Onaway! Awake, beloved!
Thou the wild-flower of the forest!
Thou the wild-bird of the prairie!
Thou with eyes so soft and fawn-like!
"If thou only lookest at me,
I am happy, I am happy,
As the lilies of the prairie,
When they feel the dew upon them!
"Sweet thy breath is as the fragrance
Of the wild-flowers in the morning,
As their fragrance is at evening,
In the Moon when leaves are falling.

"Does not all the blood within me
Leap to meet thee, leap to meet thee,
As the springs to meet the sunshine,
In the Moon when nights are brightest?
"Onaway! my heart sings to thee,
Sings with joy when thou art near me,
As the sighing, singing branches
In the pleasant Moon of Strawberries!

"When thou art not pleased, beloved,
Then my heart is sad and darkened,
As the shining river darkens
When the clouds drop shadows on it!
"When thou smilest, my beloved,
Then my troubled heart is brightened,
As in sunshine gleam the ripples
That the cold wind makes in rivers.

"Smiles the earth, and smile the waters,
Smile the cloudless skies above us,
But I lose the way of smiling
When thou art no longer near me!
"I myself, myself! behold me!
Blood of my beating heart, behold me!
O awake, awake, beloved!
Onaway! awake, beloved!"

Thus the gentle Chibiabos
Sang his song of love and longing;
And lagoo, the great boaster,
He the marvellous story-teller,

He the friend of old Nokomis,
Jealous of the sweet musician,
Jealous of the applause they gave him,
Saw in all the eyes around him,
Saw in all their looks and gestures,
That the wedding guests assembled
Longed to hear his pleasant stories,
His immeasurable falsehoods.

Very boastful was lagoo;
Never heard he an adventure
But himself had met a greater;
Never any deed of daring
But himself had done a bolder;
Never any marvellous story
But himself could tell a stranger.
Would you listen to his boasting,
Would you only give him credence,
No one ever shot an arrow
Half so far and high as he had;
Ever caught so many fishes,
Ever killed so many reindeer,
Ever trapped so many beaver!
None could run so fast as he could
None could dive so deep as he could,
None could swim so far as he could;
None had made so many journeys,
None had seen so many wonders,
As this wonderful lagoo,
As this marvellous story-teller!

Thus his name became a by-word
And a jest among the people;
And whene'er a boastful hunter
Praised his own address too highly,
Or a warrior, home returning,
Talked too much of his achievements,
All his hearers cried, "lagoo!
Here's lagoo come among us!"

He it was who carved the cradle
Of the little Hiawatha,

Carved its framework out of linden,
Bound it strong with reindeer sinews;
He it was who taught him later
How to make his bows and arrows,
How to make the bows of ash-tree,
And the arrows of the oak-tree.

So among the guests assembled
At my Hiawatha's wedding
Sat lagoo, old and ugly,
Sat the marvellous story-teller.
And they said, "O good lagoo,
Tell us now a tale of wonder,
Tell us of some strange adventure,
That the feast may be more joyous,
That the time may pass more gayly,
And our guests be more contented!"

And lagoo answered straightway,
"You shall hear a tale of wonder,
You shall hear the strange adventures
Of Osseo, the Magician,
From the Evening Star descended."

Such was Hiawatha's Wedding,
Thus the wedding-banquet ended,
And the wedding-guests departed.
Leaving Hiawatha happy
With the night and Minnehaha.

*[Pemican: deer or buffalo meat, dried and
pounded.*

Mondamin: Indian corn

*Nagow Wudjoo: sand dunes of Lake
Superior*

Onaway: Awake!]

William Smith – tenor

A Birmingham Conservatoire of Music graduate, lyric tenor William Smith is an Iford Arts New Generation artist. He previously studied in Paris with Glenn Chambers and currently with voice teacher David Pollard. He co-founded Theatre de L'eneide in Paris and has performed with the company in France.

Recent engagements include Belmonte in Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* for Popup Opera, Rossini's *Petite messe solennelle* and *Stabat Mater*, Mendelssohn's *Elijah* and Finzi's *Dies Natalis*.

William has sung with Opéra de Lyon and Longborough Opera. He is a member of the Grange Festival chorus 2017 performing in Bizet's *Carmen*, Verdi's *Requiem* and Britten's *Albert Herring*.

John Naylor - conductor

As conductor, singer and organist, John combines extensive performance experience in world-class choirs with a lifelong passionate interest in choral music and its performance. Following a successful business career he now devotes most of his activities to conducting, choir development and church administration. His original training was as a choral scholar at St John's College, Cambridge with the great Dr George Guest after keyboard studies with Conrad Eden at Durham Cathedral where he was a chorister (1957 – 61), a music scholarship at Rossall School and singing studies with Wilfrid Brown and Lyndon van der Pump from The Royal College of Music.

He subsequently became a professional member of the Chapel Royal Choir of St Peter ad Vincula at H.M. Tower of London and The Monteverdi Choir and Louis Halsey Singers, appearing at The Proms, The South Bank, The Aldeburgh Festival and in numerous broadcasts and recordings. He has sung in the cathedral choirs of Carlisle, Christ Church Oxford and Chester where until recently he could still be occasionally spotted on the back row!

John has been Director of The Lydian Singers since founding the choir in 1980. They are now one of the leading chamber choirs in the North West and have performed extensively in the North West, Spain, France, Italy and in most of the cathedrals in Great Britain, often returning several times by invitation. He also conducts The Open University Chapel Choir.

John was appointed Music Director of Nantwich Choral Society in September 2005 for whom he has now conducted highly acclaimed performances of works in the mainstream choral repertoire including Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, Bach's *St John Passion* and *St Matthew Passion* (both in Chester Cathedral), and Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610*, Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*, Fauré's *Requiem*, Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man* with Ensemble Vocal Arpège de Mâcon, Mozart's *Requiem* and Bach's *B minor Mass* with the period

instruments of the 18th Century Concert Orchestra, Vaughan Williams *Sea Symphony* and *The Lark Ascending*, Haydn's *The Seasons* and *The Dream of Gerontius* in Chester Cathedral, Coleridge Taylor's *Hiawatha* and Elgar's *Enigma Variations* with the Northern Concordia Orchestra, and Handel's *Coronation Anthems* and the *Dettingen Te Deum* with the 18th Century Sinfonia.

Performances in 2015 and 2016 included Handel's *Judas Maccabeus*, Haydn's *Harmoniemesse*, Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Requiem* and Duruflé's *Requiem* with NCS; weekends at Tewkesbury Abbey, Brecon Cathedral, Handel's *Dixit Dominus* and Schubert *Mass in G* at The Lymm Festival with The Lydian Singers, and Ely, Ripon and St Albans cathedrals with OUCC. He conducted an especially memorable performance of Bach's *St John Passion* at Easter 2016 with his former colleague Rogers Covey-Crump as the Evangelist.

2017 included Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, Rutter's *Magnificat* and *Sprig of Thyme* and Verdi *Requiem* with NCS, Durham and Peterborough cathedrals and Will Todd's *Mass in Blue* at The Lymm Festival with The Lydian Singers, and Blackburn, Liverpool and Oxford cathedrals with OUCC.

In addition to his musical activities, John has been Chairman of the Lichfield Diocesan Board of Finance since 2012. He is also a member of the General Synod of the Church of England.

Simon Russell

Simon is a former Organ Scholar of St Catharine's College Cambridge and Assistant Organist of Chester Cathedral. Now a freelance organist, he is much in demand as a regular contributor to organ recital series in cathedrals and churches throughout the UK.

Simon is currently the Northern Region Coordinator for the RSCM, Organist at St Mary's Nantwich and is the regular accompanist for NCS and the Lydian Singers.

Programme of events 2018

Saturday 24th March, 7.30 pm

St Mary's Church Nantwich

Dvorak - Stabat Mater

Vaughan Williams - Benedicite

Poulenc - Organ Concerto

with

The Nantwich Sinfonia

Saturday 23 June 2018, 7.30 pm

St Mary's Church Nantwich

Gala Concert with Richard Suart

Gilbert and Sullivan

NANTWICH CHORAL SOCIETY

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ncs200club@gmail.com