





The Combined Chorus of the Billericay, Maldon & Witham Choral Societies present:

Mendelssohn



Programme

Saturday 1st April 2023



We welcome to you tonight's performance of Mendelssohn's "Elijah", presented to you by the combined chorus of three local choirs. The Billericay, Maldon and Witham Choral Societies have been working hard, with their musical directors and accompanists, throughout this term and are pleased to bring the story of this great Biblical prophet to life with the aid of our superb professional soloists, all accompanied by Ed Sutton on the organ and led, from the front, by Ashley Thompson. We all hope you enjoy the concert!

Background

Felix Mendelssohn was born in 1809 and was a precociously gifted child, turning his hand to composition and performance with ease and causing a sensation within the musical "circles" of the day. Many fine musicians acclaimed him to be the "second Mozart". Indeed, by the time he was in his 'teens he had composed a number of mature works and his career continued to flourish as an excellent performer on the violin, piano and organ as well as becoming an "inspirational" conductor.

Mendelssohn first started working on Elijah in 1938; he enlisted the help of Pastor Julius Schubring, an old friend, who drafted a libretto. The two men differed in opinion over various matters and the project was dropped until 1845 when the Birmingham Festival committee commissioned Mendelssohn to compose a new oratorio for the 1846 Festival.

Mendelssohn dove into the project once more, generally working on both the libretto and the music alone. The work was first performed on 26th August 1846 in the Birmingham Town Hall to an audience of two thousand whose vociferous enthusiasm for the piece catapulted Mendelssohn to the pinnacle of his career. Sadly, Mendelssohn never saw these echelons of success again as he died a year later following the death of his beloved sister, Fanny, from whose loss he never recovered.

by Tom Rodgers, Accompanist, Billericay Choral Society, With some words, used with permission, by John Bawden



Synopsis

First Part

Mendelssohn's oratorio conveys the key moments in the life of the B.C.E prophet, Elijah. It begins with Elijah proclaiming the curse of drought, the ensuing tragedy being depicted by the somewhat turbulent overture. The people issue a plea to God, "Lord, bow Thine ear to our prayer" for the "harvest was over, the summer days gone" yet there was no heavenly "power coming to help them": the rivers are "exhausted", the children kept asking for bread but there was none to be broken for them.

The people of Israel are desperate but, despite this, continue to ignore the advice from Obadiah (Elijah's servant) who tells them the only way out is to forsake their idols and return to God.

Elijah is accused of causing all the troubles that Israel faced. His response is one of defiance for it was not he, but the people themselves, who had brought this upon themselves by not worshipping God but their own false gods instead. A challenge is issued by Elijah to the priests of Baal: a duel of the Gods.

Each side would have to prepare a sacrifice and, through prayer alone to their own God, a fire would be ignited beneath the proffered sacrifice.

The Baalists go first. Their prayers are unanswered (depicted by musical silences) and so Elijah mocks them to "pray louder". The prayers crescendo but, still, no answer from Baal. When the fire remains unlit Elijah urges the people of Israel to turn away from Baal and to send their prayers to the one, true, God.

With their prayers redirected, God rewards the people by sending the fire to consume the sacrifice. Elijah orders the priests of Baal to be slain; those who turned back to God, though, are spared. Elijah joins in prayer with the people of Israel for the drought to be ended.

Three times he sends a youth to see if any rainclouds were coming; three times the answer was "no".

Finally, a small child espies a cloud, far away.

God has rewarded his now faithful people with rain and the drought has passed.



Elijah, full of confidence following his success in petitioning with the people to God to end the drought, appears before King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. Elijah accuses the monarch of provoking the wrath of God through worshipping the false god Baal. The Queen, having none of this, counterattacks with claims of Elijah's treachery and stirs up the people against the prophet by calling for Elijah's blood and blaming him for the famine. "Yes," the people say, "it was Elijah who proclaimed the curse on our land!"; "He shall die!".

Elijah flees, on advisement by Obadiah, to the wilderness. From hero to zero, Elijah's confidence is lower than the rivers during the drought. Elijah asks God why the hearts of the people have hardened against him; despite all his efforts, the people of Israel have forsaken God. He prays to have his life taken as penitence for his failures: "It is enough", he says, "Now, let me die, Lord, take away my life".

Instead, God sends his angels to comfort the prophet. They tell him to "lift thine eyes to the mountains" because God will come to help him and so reassures Elijah that he always watches over Israel and never slumbers.

Elijah is summoned by an angel to travel forty days to Mount Horeb, God's sacred mountain, where the Lord will be revealed. Elijah becomes impatient, asking God why he let his "people forsake him?". The angel responds with a simple message: "O, rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him, and he will grant your heart's desires".

Night falls around Elijah and he still prays to God. When God does draw near, a "mighty wind" appears, swirling around the mountain; the sea "upheaved", the earth shaken, followed by a fire.

Amongst all this tempestuous noise, God was not found. Instead, he is seen in the "small, still voice of calm" that only came after the terrible fire.

Elijah is at peace. He stands, ready and reassured, enlightened by the awe and wonder of God. He ascends into heaven and the chorus describes his ascension: "Then did Elijah break forth like a fire"; they sing of his accomplishments.

"The righteous shall break forth as the sun their heavenly Father's realm" as claimed by the Tenor sings, concluding the story of Elijah. The oratorio finishes with the chorus declaring: "O Lord, our Creator, how excellent your name is in all the heavens. Amen."

Programme Of Music



FIRST PART

Elijah: Introduction
Overture
Chorus: Help, Lord!

1.

2. Duet with Chorus: Lord! Bow Thine Ear To Our Prayer

Obadiah (Recitative): Ye People, Rend Your Hearts
 Obadiah (Air): If With All Your Hearts

5. Chorus: Yet Do The Lord See It Not

6. Elijah (Recit.) with Chorus: As God The Lord
7. Chorus: Baal, We Cry To Thee
8. Elijah (Recit.): Call Him Louder

9. Chorus: Hear Our Cry, O Baal! 10. Elijah (Recit.): Call Him Louder

11. Chorus: Baal! Hear And Answer
12. Elijah (Recit. & Air): Draw Near, All Ye People

13. Quartet: Cast Thy Burden Upon The Lord

Elijah (Recit.) and Chorus: O Thou, Who Makest Thine Angels, Spirits

15. Elijah (Air): Is Not His Word Like A Fire?

Alto (Air): Woe Unto Them
 Obadiah (Recit.): O Man Of God, F

17. Obadiah (Recit.):
18. Elijah (Recit.) with Youth:
O Man Of God, Help Thy People
O Lord, Thou Hast Overthrown*

19. Chorus: Thanks Be To God

*featuring Sebastian Lindsay, Head Chorister, Chelmsford Cathedral as the Youth

INTERVAL

SECOND PART

20. Soprano (Air): Hear Ye, Israel 21. Chorus: Be Not Afraid

22. Elijah (Recit.) and Chorus: The Lord Hath Exalted Thee

23. Chorus: Woe To Him!
24. Obadiah & Elijah (Recit.): Man Of God
25. Elijah (Air): It Is Enough

26. The Angels: Lift Thine Eyes
27. Chorus: He, Watching Over Israel
28. Alto & Elijah (Recit.): Arise, Elijah

29. The Angel (Alto) (Air): O Rest In The Lord

30. Chorus: Behold, God The Lord Passed By

31. Elijah (Recit.): I Go On My Way In The Strength Of The Lord

32. Elijah (Air): For The Mountains Shall Depart

33. Chorus: Then Did Elijah

Tenor (Air): Then Shall The Righteous Shine Forth
 Chorus: And Then Shall Your Light Break Forth



1. The People Help, Lord! wilt Thou quite destroy us? The harvest now is over, the summer days are gone, and yet no power cometh to help us! [Jeremiah 8: 20] Will then the Lord be no more God in Zion? [Jer. 8:19*]

RECITATIVE CHORUS

The deeps afford no water, and the rivers are exhausted! The suckling's tongue now cleaveth for thirst to his mouth: the infant children ask for bread, and there is no one breaketh it to feed them! [Lamentations 4:4]

- The People Lord, bow Thine ear to our prayer. [Psalm 86:1.6†]
 - Duet Zion spreadeth her hands for aid; and there is neither help nor comfort. [Lam. 1:17]
- 5. The People Yet doth the Lord see it not: He mocketh at us; His curse hath fallen down upon us; His wrath will pursue us, till He destroy us. [Dt. 28:15†; 28:22]
- 6. Chorus Thou art Elijah, he that troubleth
 - Elijah I never troubled Israel's peace: it is thou, Ahab, and all thy father's house. Ye have forsaken God's commands; and thou hast followed Baalim! [1 Kgs. 18:18]

Now send and gather to me, the whole of Israel unto Mount Carmel: there summon the prophets of Baal, and also the prophets of the groves, who are feasted at Jezebel's table. Then we shall see whose God is God the Lord. [1 Kgs. 18:19.21]

- Chorus And then we shall see whose God is the Lord.
- Elijah Rise then, ye priests of Baal: select and slay a bullock, and put no fire under

it: uplift your voices, and call the God ye worship: and I then will call on the Lord Jehovah: and the God who by fire shall answer, let him be God. [I Kgs. 18:23,24]

- Chorus Yea; and the God who by fire shall answer, let him be God.
- Elijah Call first upon your God: your numbers are many: I, even I, only remain, one prophet of the Lord! Invoke your forest-gods and mountain deities. [1 Kgs. 18:22,†25]

- 7. Priests of Baal Baal, we cry to thee; hear and answer us! Heed the sacrifice we offer hear us, O hear us, Baal! [1 Kgs. 18:26]

 Hear, mighty god! Baal, O answer us!

 Let thy flames fall and extirpate the foe!

 O hear us, Baal!
- 9. Priests of Baal Hear our cry, O Baal! now arise! wherefore slumber?
- 11. Priests of Baal Hear and answer, Baal! Mark how the scorner derideth us! Hear and answer!
- 14. The People The fire descends from heaven; the flames consume his offering! Before Him upon your faces fall! The Lord is God: [1 Kgs, 18:38,39] O Israel, hear! Our God is one Lord: [Dt.6:4†] and we will have no other Gods before the Lord! [Dt. 5:7†]
- 18. The People Open the heavens and send us relief: help, help Thy servant now, O God!
 - The People Then hear from heaven, and forgive the sin! Help! send Thy scrvant help, O God!
 - The People Thanks be to God for all His mercies! [Ps. 106:1]
 - Thanks be to God! He laveth the thirsty land! The waters gather; they rush along; they are lifting their voices! [Ps. 93:3]

The stormy billows are high; their fury is mighty. But the Lord is above them, and Almighty! [Ps. 93:4]



Second Part

21. Be not afraid, saith God the Lord. Be not afraid, thy help is near. God, the Lord thy God, saith unto thee, 'Be not afraid!' [Isa. 41:10]

Though thousands languish and fall beside thee, and tens of thousands around thee perish; yet still it shall not come nigh thee. [Ps. 91:7]

22. The Queen Have ye not heard he hath prophesied against all Israel?

Chorus We heard it with our ears. [Jer. 26:11]
The Queen Hath he not prophesied also against the King of Israel?

Chorus We heard it with our ears.

The Queen And why hath he spoken in the name of the Lord? [Jer. 26:9]

Doth Ahab govern the kingdom of Israel while Elijah's power is greater than the king's? [1 Kgs. 21:7]

The gods do so to me, and more; if, by tomorrow about this time, I make not his life as the life of one of them whom he hath sacrificed at the Brook of Kishon! [1 Kgs. 19:2]

Chorus He shall perish!

The Queen Hath he not destroyed Baal's prophets?

Chorus He shall perish!

The Queen Yea, by the sword he destroyed them all!

Chorus He destroyed them all!

The Queen He also closed the heavens! [Ecclesiasticus 48:3†]

Chorus He also closed the heavens!

The Queen And called down a famine upon the land. [Ecclus. 48:2†]

Chorus And called down a famine upon the land.

The Queen So go ye forth and seize Elijah, for he is worthy to die; [Jer. 26:11] slaughter him! do unto him as he hath done!

Woe to him, he shall perish; for he closed the heavens! And why hath he spoken in the name of the Lord? Let the guilty prophet perish! He hath spoken falsely against our land and us, as we have heard with our ears. [Jer. 26:11] So go ye forth; seize on him! He shall die!

26. Angels Lift thine eyes to the mountains, whence cometh help. Thy help cometh from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He hath said, thy foot shall not be moved: thy keeper will never slumber. [Ps. 121:1,2,3+]

27. Angels He, watching over Israel, slumbers not nor sleeps. [Ps. 121:4] Shouldst thou, walking in grief, languish; He will quicken thee. [Ps. 138:7]

Behold! God the Lord passed by! And a mighty wind rent the mountains around, brake in pieces the rocks, brake them before the Lord: but yet the Lord was not in the tempest. [1 Kgs. 19:11]

Behold! God the Lord passed by! And the sea was upheaved, and the earth was shaken: but yet the Lord was not in the earthquake. [1 Kgs. 19:11]

And after the earthquake there came a fire: but yet the Lord was not in the fire. [1 Kgs. 19:12]

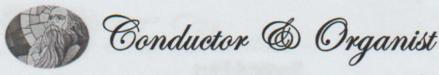
And after the fire there came a still small voice; [1 Kgs. 19:12] and in that still voice, onward came the Lord.

Then did Elijah the prophet break forth like a fire; his words appeared like burning torches. [Ecclus. 48:1†] Mighty kings by him were overthrown. [Ecclus. 48:6†] He stood on the mount of Sinai, and heard the judgements of the future; and in Horeb, its vengeance. [Ecclus. 48:7†]

And when the Lord would take him away to heaven, [2 Kgs. 2:1] lol there came a fiery chariot, with fiery horses; and he went by a whirlwind to heaven. [2 Kgs. 2:11]

35. And then shall your light break forth as the light of morning breaketh, and your health shall speedily spring forth then; and the glory of the Lord ever shall reward you. [Isa, 58:8†]

> Lord, our Creator, how excellent Thy Name is in all the nations! Thou fillest heaven with Thy glory. [Ps. 8:1] Amen!



Ashley Thompson, Conductor

Ashley Thompson is the Director of Music for both the Maldon and Witham Choral Societies and the Triple-H Community Choir which serves Hockley, Hawkwell and Hullbridge in South Essex.

Ashley is an experienced, ALCM-qualified, repetiteur and is currently working as Accompanist to the Anglia Singers (Chelmsford) and the Gale Singers (Dagenham). He has previously played for Maldon, Ingatestone and Billericay Choral Societies, the Canvey Island Community Choir, Essex Police Music Society, Eastwood Chorale, United Singers (Hornchurch), the Southend Operatic and Dramatic Society and the Billericay Operatic and Dramatic Society.

Outside of music Ashley has worked, until recently, as a Borough Councillor for the Liberal Democrats in his native Leigh-on-Sea; he is also a steady, rather than spectacular, opening batsman in the lower reaches of The Essex League.

Ed Sutton, Organist

Ed Sutton first worked with choirs as Diocesan Organ Scholar in Norwich. He was simultaneously major music scholar at the King's School, Ely. He read music at the University of Edinburgh and continued his studies at the University of Exeter where he was Ouseley Senior Organ Scholar, researching the choral music of Giovanni Paolo Cima. Since then Ed has held various organist and choir director positions. Ed left the music world many years ago and took a better paid career in financial services. He currently works in underwriting and product development in The City and lives in Chelmsford with his miniature schnauzer. He enjoys quizzes and gin-often in combination!

Soloists

Jack Holton (Baritone - Elijah)

Jack Holton is a Young Artist on the Global Talent Programme at the National Opera Studio and a Young Artist with Opera Prelude, having previously trained on the Opera Course at Guildhall School of Music & Drama under John Evans. This year he is the grateful recipient of a Help Musicians Sybil Tutton Opera Award, an Opera Awards Foundation Bursary, and was the winner of the Musicians' Company 2022 Saloman Seelig Award.

This term at NOS, Jack performed as Figaro Le Nozze di Figaro, Figaro Il Barbiere di Siviglia, and Belcore L'elisir d'amore as part of the National Opera's residency at WNO; and Youth and Love, a concert of Song at the Wigmore Hall.



At GSMD in 2022, Jack performed Simon Miss Fortune; Ben Upthegrove The Telephone; Der Zar Der Zar lässt sich photographieren. At Opera Holland Park Jack performed the role of La Poigne Margot la Rouge, and Master Page Sir John in Love for British Youth Opera.

Previous roles include Count Anckarström Un ballo in maschera (Opera Holland Park - Young Artist); Le Podestat Le docteur Miracle and Le Baron de Pictordu Cendrillon (GSMD); Don Parmenione L'occasione fa il ladro (British Youth Opera); Sky Masterson Guys and Dolls (West Green House Opera); Don Giovanni (for Rogue Opera and The Merry Opera Company); Eugene Onegin (Oxford Alternative Orchestra/The People's Opera); 3rd Bandit Don Quichotte (Wexford Festival Opera); The Count The Marriage of Figaro (Hewletts Opera). Other significant performances include Elder Brother The Hogboon and one of the Princes des ténèbres Le Damnation de Faust, both under the baton of Sir Simon Rattle with the LSO, and singing as the baritone soloist in Stravinsky's Pulcinella under the baton of Joshua Weilerstein in Milton Court Concert Hall.

Eva Gheorghiu (Soprano)

American-Romanian Soprano Eva Gheorghiu is a graduate student The Juilliard School, where she gained a Bachelor's Degree in Music; also of the Guildhall School of Music & Drama with Master degrees in both Music and Performance.

Eva's most recent and notable performances include Mistress Page in British Youth Opera's new production of Sir John in Love by Vaughan Williams (2022), Sandman in Humperdinck's Hansel and Gretel with British Youth Opera (2021), Nedda in Leoncavallo's Pagliacci with Aylesbury Opera (2020), as well as the soprano soloist in Elijah with the Banbury Choral Society (2019). Eva has also recently been part of the Chorus for Tchaikovsky's Eugene Onegin at Opera Holland Park (2022) and was part of Rogue Opera's online concert series as a soloist.

This summer, Eva will return to Opera Holland Park as part of their Chorus in Puccini's La Bohème.

Eva has been a recipient of the Cecilia Entner Scholarship, Edwina Eustis Endowed Scholarship, Joan and Robert Arnow Scholarship, Mary E. Birsh Scholarship, P.J. Hoyland Memorial Scholars, R. Maurice Boyd Scholarship for Vocal Studies, and the William R. Hearst Scholarship at The Juilliard School. She has also been a proud recipient of the Guildhall Scholar Award at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama.



Lucilla Graham (Mezzo Soprano)

Lucilla Graham was born in Glasgow and grew up in North Berwick. She is a graduate of the University of Glasgow and the Royal Northern College of Music.

On the operatic stage, roles include Amastre (Serse), Mercedes (Carmen), Nerone (Il Coronazione di Poppea), Iolanthe (Iolanthe), and Edelknaben (Tannhäuser). In the UK and Ireland Lucilla has worked with opera companies including Grange Park Opera, Longborough and the Wexford Festival. Lucilla is a member of the Bayreuth Festival chorus where she has sung in productions of Götterdämmerung, Lohengrin, Der Fliegende Hollander, Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg, and Parsifal. She will return to Bayreuth for the 2023 summer season.

Lucilla enjoys the concert and oratorio repertoire and is fortunate to have performed throughout the UK in venues such as Bristol Cathedral, the Royal Albert Hall and King's College Cambridge. As a soloist on the concert stage recent performances include Rossini's Stabat Mater, Handel's Messiah, Vivaldi's Gloria and Mendelssohn's Elijah. As an ensemble singer Lucilla regularly collaborates with Blossom Street Chamber Choir and Jervaulx Singers. From September 2023 Lucilla will join the Vienna Staatsoper as a full time member of the chorus.

John Pierce (Tenor)

John Pierce, local piano and singing teacher living in Billericay, is originally from Holywell, North Wales. John studied at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester and continued his advanced training at the National Opera Studio in London, supported by the Welsh National Opera. He represented Wales at the Cardiff Singer of the World in 2011. John has performed at many of the UK leading Opera Houses and concert venues and has won many competitions and scholarships; these include Young Welsh Singer, Welsh Singer of the Year, the Prince of Wales scholarship, the Susan Chilcott Scholarship, the Countess of Munster scholarship and the prestigious Elizabeth Harwood Memorial Prize.

Career highlights include performing for the late Queen Elizabeth and Duke of Edinburgh at Buckingham Palace during a reception for Young People in the Performing Arts and performing for HRH Prince Charles to celebrate his 50th year of being the Patron of Wales. In 2018 John was invited to perform at the Water Rats Ball at the Grosvenor Hotel alongside Alfie Boe, Michael Ball, Katherine Jenkins and Rick Wakeman.

The interval refreshments are being served downstairs by local charity "Sanctus'. Here is some information about them—please support generously. Thank you.

Sanctus

Sanctus is a charity supporting homeless and vulnerable people in Chelmsford and the surrounding areas. Until October last year we opened 7 days 365 days a year but, due to the economic crisis, a decision was made to close at weekends - a decision that was extremely difficult to make.

Sanctus operates a three-storey building. On our ground floor is the Sanctus Café which provides a safe and warm environment. We provide free nutritious meals which are served along-side hot and cold drinks, snacks, sandwiches and pastries. In addition to this, we distribute clothes, tents, sleeping bags, sanitary products, toiletries and other essential items. Through our Café, we are able to offer food, warmth and a safe haven but this service is designed as a gate-way to build trust and lead individuals on to accessing wider support. In 2022 over 17000 meals were served and over 19,000 food items were collected from local businesses and distributed that otherwise would have gone to waste.

Our Support Hub, on the 2nd and 3rd floors, offers free support services including 1:1 mentoring, assistance with gaining housing and sustaining tenancies, benefits applications, furnishing homes, addiction and mental health support, health and well-being advice and signposting and a range of other advocacy services. We work to target the root causes of why someone is homeless, at risk of being homeless or other vulnerabilities. Just one support session may be the one that turns someone's life around or prevents life impacting actions. Over 2,000 support sessions were completed in 2022

The purpose of our organisation it to provide a centre in the heart of the city where individuals, with various complex needs, can come and receive food and support. This is a community space, which we invite other service providers to utilise, to generate a holistic approach to supporting individuals.

We believe that everyone should have a safe and secure home, food on the table and network of support. Our aim is to be there for vulnerable people at a moment of crisis and provide them with the necessary help. From this moment, we then work alongside them in their journey to recovery to help them to take steps to lead a positive life. Referrals to other services can often take time, which leaves individuals in an extremely vulnerable state. At Sanctus, we are able to provide immediate support in these interim periods and continue to provide support alongside other services.

What is unique about our services is there is no set criteria to receive our support. Our work is person centred, meaning we tailor our support offering to each individual. We aim to help vulnerable individuals to build confidence and trust in support services, so they can receive help both from us and other agencies and statutory services.

Sanctus 30-32 Broomfield Rd., Chelmsford CM1 1SW 01245 257985



The combined committees of the Billericay, Maldon & Witham Choral Societies would like to thank....

Christ Church URC for the use of their building; to all our soloists (Jack, Eva, Lucilla, John and Sebastian); to individual members of the joint choir sub-committee for their investment of time and energy into this project; to all of the singers from the three choirs for their continued hard work this term in learning this great classical choral work; to the accompanists of all three choirs (Emma Nash, Ed Sutton & Tom Rodgers); most importantly, to Ed Sutton and Ashley Thompson who have led all three choirs from the front throughout the term and enabled them to bring this performance to you this evening.

Thanks also to all those who have helped "front of house"; to Sanctus for the refreshments and to Tom Rodgers for the design of the concert poster, concert programmes and for writing the programme notes.

Finally, thank you to you, our audience, for your support this evening.



<u>The Billericay Choral Society</u> meets weekly, during term-time, on Tuesdays in the Billericay Methodist Church on Western Road between 7:30pm and 9:30pm.

www.billericaychoral.co.uk

The Maldon Choral Society meets weekly, during term-time, on Thursdays in All Saints Primary School, on Highlands Drive, between 7:30pm and 9:30pm.







The Witham Choral Society meets weekly, during term-time, on Tuesdays, in Witham URC in Newland St. between 7:45pm and 9:45pm.

www.withamchoralsociety.org.uk