

The background of the album cover features a dramatic scene of a large, dark, jagged rock formation. Heavy, dark metal chains are wrapped around the rock, with some links appearing to be breaking or glowing with a bright orange and yellow light. The overall atmosphere is dark and intense, with a strong sense of fire and rebellion. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures of the rock and the metallic sheen of the chains.

**CHANDOS**

# PARRY

Scenes from Shelley's

**PROMETHEUS UNBOUND**

**BLEST PAIR OF SIRENS**

Sarah Fox *soprano*

Dame Sarah Connolly *mezzo-soprano*

David Butt Philip *tenor*

Neal Davies *bass-baritone*

Crouch End Festival Chorus

London Mozart Players

**WILLIAM VANN**



Courtesy of the Parry Archive, at Shulbrede Priory

Charles Hubert Hastings Parry, c. 1883

## Sir Charles Hubert Hastings Parry (1848 – 1918)

*première recording*

### Scenes from Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound' (1880)\* 61:02

Dramatic Cantata

for Soloists, Chorus, and Orchestra

Dedicated to C. Harford Lloyd, Esq.

Edited by Jeremy Dibble

#### Part I. Introduction

[34:35]

- |   |   |   |      |
|---|---|---|------|
| <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">1</span> | 1 | Maestoso, assai lento –   | 2:40 |
| <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">2</span> |   | Prometheus: 'Monarch of Gods and Dæmons'. Maestoso, ma non troppo lento – Poco più moto –                   | 1:40 |
| <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">3</span> |   | Prometheus: 'Alas! Ah me!'. Andante con moto – Più moto – Tempo giusto – Sostenuto – Stringendo – Allegro – | 2:51 |
| <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">4</span> |   | Voice from the mountains: 'Thrice three hundred thousand years'. Adagio –                                   | 2:00 |
| <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">5</span> |   | Mercury: 'Awful sufferer!'. [ ] – Sostenuto – Più moto – Molto sostenuto – Più lento –                      | 3:57 |
| <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">6</span> |   | Chorus of Furies: 'Prometheus! Immortal Titan!'. Allegro – Con moto – Più moto                              | 4:06 |

7	2	The Earth: 'I felt thy torture, son'. Andante con moto – [ ] – Tempo I – Andante molto sostenuto –	2:59
8		Chorus of Spirits: 'From unremember'd ages we'. A tempo –	4:19
9		Prometheus: 'How fair these airborne shapes!'. Più moto, ma poco più sostenuto – Sostenuto – A tempo più sostenuto – Largamente – Adagio –	3:29
10		Voices of Spirits: 'Life of Life!'. Andante con moto moderato –	2:53
11		Contralto: 'Fair are others'. Meno mosso – Sostenuto ad libitum	3:37
<b>Part II</b>			<b>[26:27]</b>
<b>Scene 1</b>			
12	3	Allegro moderato – Jupiter: 'Ye congregated pow'rs of heav'n'. Slower – Poco più mosso – Poco meno mosso – Allegro [comodo] –	4:16
13		Jupiter: 'Awful shape, what art thou?'. Maestoso – Demogorgon: 'Eternity'. [ ] –	2:27
14		Jupiter: 'Oh, that thou wouldst make mine enemy my judge'. Allegro – Allegro molto – Largamente	2:15
15	4	Andante – Spirit of the Hour: 'Soon as the sound had ceased'. [ ] – [Poco] più moto – [Più moto ma giusto] – Poco sostenuto	4:30

## Scene 2

- 16 5 Voice of unseen Spirits: 'The pale stars are gone!'. Allegro comodo –  
Semichorus of Hours: 'The voice of the Spirits of Air and of  
Earth'. [ ] –  
Chorus of Spirits: 'Weave the dance on the floor of the breeze'.  
Allegro molto – Più allegro – Presto –  
Chorus of Hours: 'Whence come ye, so wild and so fleet'.  
Allegro moderato – 7:03
- 17 Spirits: 'We come from the mind'. Andante – Più lento –  
Poco più mosso – 2:20
- 18 Chorus of Spirits and Hours: 'Then weave the web of the mystic  
measure'. Allegro moderato – Più moto ed accelerando –  
Allegro molto [tempo giusto] – [Alla breve] 3:33

19

**Blest Pair of Sirens** (1887)

9:41

in E flat major • in Es-Dur • en mi bémol majeur

(At a Solemn Musick)

An Ode

for Chorus and Orchestra

To Charles Villiers Stanford and the members of the Bach Choir

Allegro moderato, ma energico –

Animando – Animandosi – Più moto –

Tempo I – Meno mosso, ma non troppo lento –

Allegro – Più mosso

TT 70:48

**Sarah Fox** soprano (Spirit of the Hour)\*

**Dame Sarah Connolly** mezzo-soprano (The Earth)\*

**David Butt Philip** tenor (Jupiter / Mercury)\*

**Neal Davies** bass-baritone (Prometheus)\*

**Crouch End Festival Chorus**

**David Temple** musical director

**London Mozart Players**

**Simon Blendis** leader

**James Orford** organ

**William Vann**



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Sarah Fox



Christopher Pledger

Dame Sarah Connolly

## Crouch End Festival Chorus

David Temple chorus master

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### *soprano*

Rosamund Bell  
Catherine Best  
Åshild Haugen Bjorkeng  
Pilar Bolado  
Helen Collier  
Margaret Ellerby  
Ellie Fieldsend  
Felicity Ford  
Genevieve Helsby  
Clare James  
Sheena James  
Rachel Johnson  
Emma Lindsey  
Laura MacDarby  
Sarah Niblock  
Sarah Robinson  
Kate Screen  
Melanie Servante  
Jenny Vernon  
Pamela Vernon  
Lucy Whitman  
Rosemary Zolynski

### *alto*

Lucy Bailey  
Ida Bougouin  
Alison Brister  
Tina Burnett  
Bethany Burrow

Becky Claye  
Sarah Elliot  
Natalie Fine  
Mary Grove  
Charlotte Halliday  
Ela Harrison  
Pauline Hoyle  
Emma Kemball-Cook  
Diana Leadbetter  
Hannah Leonard  
Paula Miller  
Diana Parkinson  
Alankar Scheideler  
Karen Stead  
Sue Steel  
Anna Stuttard  
Susannah Witriol

### *tenor*

Bob Bishop  
Joshua Blunsden  
James Brown  
Trevor Dawson  
John Featherstone  
Pedro Ferreira  
Robin Green  
Matt Griffin  
Peter Herbert  
Steve James  
Lee Marshall

Colin McIntyre  
Frank Norman  
Julian Reed  
Clive Seale  
Guy Shirm  
John Vernon  
Paul Winter  
Steve Wright

### *bass*

Hugh Bowden  
Bruce Boyd  
Michael Brookes  
Robert Gorrie  
Stephen Greenaway  
Bryan Hammersley  
Carl Heap  
Stephen Jullien  
Geoffrey Kemball-Cook  
John Mindlin  
Daryn Moody  
Fred Ponsonby  
Peter Reddingius  
Alistair Scott  
David Sloan  
Ralph Smith  
Peter West  
Christopher Wetherall  
Robin White  
Alistair Yates





Andrew Staples

David Butt Philip



© Gerard Collett Photography

Neal Davies

## Parry: Scenes from Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound' / Blest Pair of Sirens

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### Scenes from Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound'

In looking for a practical starting point for anything that may be usefully considered in relation to present day music, I think it unnecessary to go back farther than 1880. I do not say definitely that that is the best starting point, but it is sufficient for the purpose... Some of us who in that year were young and taking an active part in music – a really active part such as playing in orchestras – felt that something at last was going to be done in the way of composition in the English school.

These words appeared in Edward Elgar's inaugural lecture as Peyton Professor of Music at the University of Birmingham, on 16 March 1905. Tantalisingly, Elgar never referred specifically to a particular composer or work in his lecture, but that he chose 1880 as the 'starting point' suggests that, as a twenty-three-year-old aspiring violinist, he was more than likely aware of the new choral work by Hubert Parry (1848 – 1918) which had been commissioned for the 1880

Gloucester Three Choirs Festival. Elgar's statement predated Ernest Walker's assertion, in *A History of Music in England*, of 1907, that

if we seek for a definite birthday for modern English music, 7 September 1880, when *Prometheus* saw the light at Gloucester and met with a distinctly mixed reception, has undoubtedly the best claim.

Since then others, such as Francis Hueffer, W.H. Hadow, Thomas Dunhill, A.E.F. Dickinson, Herbert Howells, and Frank Howes, have reiterated this view.

In 1880, Parry was thirty-two and at the beginning of his career as a composer. Having graduated from Oxford, in 1870, he worked in Lloyd's Register of Shipping as an underwriter, but his mind was always on music. When it proved impossible to study with Brahms, he sought out the virtuoso Alsatian pianist, scholar, and champion of Wagner, Edward Dannreuther, in London, and took piano lessons from him; in time the musical catholicity and insight of Dannreuther, and the forum of his brilliant

semi-private concert series at his home, at 12, Orme Square, Bayswater, effectively became a milieu for examining and discussing contemporary European music. What is more, Dannreuther, who until his death, in 1905, remained Parry's mentor, became perhaps the most incisive critic of Parry's own compositions. In 1876 it was he who acquired free tickets for Parry to hear the second cycle of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, at Bayreuth. There, Parry met Wagner at Wahnfried, and a second, more extended acquaintance with him took place during the London Wagner Festival, in 1877, when Wagner was a guest of the Dannreuthers', at Orme Square. Dannreuther's veneration of Brahms, moreover, was central to the composition of Parry's substantial chamber works (all of which were written for performance at Orme Square), and in 1880, Dannreuther would also appear twice (under August Manns and Hans Richter) as soloist in Parry's bold Piano Concerto in F sharp major.

It was before the première of the Piano Concerto that Parry began to consider a text for his first major Gloucester Three Choirs commission. The year before, he had been drawn to Shelley's four-act lyrical drama *Prometheus Unbound*, of 1820, based on Aeschylus's tragedy *Prometheus Bound*.

A major philosophical 'psychodrama', it embodied many attributes which had strong parallels with Wagner's *Ring*, parallels which Bernard Shaw noted in *The Perfect Wagnerite*. Both works, Shaw perceived,

set forth the same conflict between humanity and its gods and governments, issuing in the redemption of man from their tyranny and by the growth of his will into perfect strength and self-confidence.

It was this sentiment that Parry wished to distil in his cantata, though it was, of course, imperative to select those parts of Shelley's text that would project the 'message' as clearly as possible. The result was the construction of a cantata in two parts, the first consisting of one extended scene (though effectively in two sections), the second of two well-demarcated scenes. On 21 March 1880 Parry was excited to present Dannreuther with what he envisaged as the first 'two scenes' of Part I (which were most likely Prometheus's opening monologue and the Chorus of Furies), but he was unable to resume work until May. By mid-July he had more or less completed the concluding chorus, though this section of the work he found particularly challenging.

After an anxious delay in the copying of the orchestral and choral parts, the long

rehearsal in Gloucester on 6 September, the day before the performance, began at ten and continued until five o'clock; after a break of two-and-a-half hours the rehearsal resumed, at seven thirty, and went on until midnight. The performing materials were riddled with errors and the manuscript choral parts – one for each individual voice (rather than the luxury of a printed vocal score) – made the task for the chorus, unfamiliar with the modern idiom, even more onerous. The chorus of 250 voices, drawn not only from Gloucester but also London, Bristol, Oxford, and Huddersfield, were put through their paces, and it was mainly owing to the Huddersfield contingent, who arranged a private rehearsal in the morning of 7 September, that the morale of the chorus was lifted. At the evening performance, in the Shire Hall, where the secular concerts took place, some sections went well, but others, such as the Chorus of Spirits, in Part I, and Jupiter's scene, in Part II, suffered major mishaps. Thanks largely to the fine singing of the soprano, Anna Williams, as the Spirit of the Hour, Parry's optimism was restored.

Press reaction to *Prometheus* varied widely. Hueffer and Shaw, both enthusiastic Wagnerians, found much to admire; for others it was the very presence of Wagnerian

influence that engendered their vehement antipathy. This negativity was perhaps best encapsulated by the critic of the *Musical Times*, who reported that

in many parts we have detached phrases of real beauty; but these are very few and very far between.

Yet, the reaction of the leader of the festival orchestra, the French violinist Prosper Sainton, summed up the polarity of impressions when he wrote to Charles Harford Lloyd (conductor of the Gloucester Festival and the dedicatee of the work):

Let me add one line more to tell you the deep, very deep impression 'Prometheus' has made upon me. There is the *étincelle électrique* so seldom found nowadays. With a fine refined performance, Mr Parry's work must create a great sensation.

Aversion to *Prometheus* continued, however, with the refusal of Stanley Lucas to publish it. 'Being out of sorts and tired,' Parry wrote in his diary, 'I was cast down.' Into the breach stepped Charles Villiers Stanford (with whom Parry had first become acquainted in 1877) who expressed a desire to perform it at Cambridge in 1881, and this positive initiative seems to have encouraged Novello to publish a vocal score. Aided by the latter

and more rehearsal time, the performance by Stanford and the Cambridge University Musical Society on 17 May 1881 was a triumph. Substantial interest in the work was also shown when, after receiving an honorary D.Mus. from the university, Parry conducted it in the Sheldonian Theatre, in Oxford, on 21 May 1884. *Prometheus* was given as well by the London Bach Choir under Otto Goldschmidt, on 19 November 1885 (when old Wagnerian hostilities appear to have been reawakened), and it was sung again, by the same body under Stanford's direction, on 24 March 1899. Since then, however, and in spite of its time-honoured position in England's musical history, it has suffered almost complete neglect. Only on 9 September 1980 was it revived, by the BBC (thanks to the work of one of its producers, Michael Pope), to mark the centenary of its première, at Gloucester; it was performed before an invited audience by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Singers, and soloists under the baton of Vernon Handley. The performance was later broadcast, on 24 September, on BBC Radio 3. Only now, however, forty-three years on from that ground-breaking broadcast, has *Prometheus* finally been recorded commercially, which allows us at last to hear and evaluate the

energy, vibrancy, and historical significance of Parry's first major choral work.

Perhaps one of the most compelling attributes of *Scenes from Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound'* is its heady flamboyance. At thirty-two, Parry was hardly a young man, but his musical development had been a gradual process in which the discovery and assimilation of modern German music had only occurred during the latter part of the 1870s, and in this sense his cantata, very much the product of his first flush of maturity, had a kind of infectious youthful verve. This can be felt in the work's striking prelude, a tragic evocation of the stark landscape and of Prometheus's harsh punishment, notably in its unsettling *fugato* on muted strings (which gives rise to some highly experimental harmony), and in the climactic Tristanesque material for wind and brass, which forms an important part of the setting for solo vocal quartet in the finale of Part II. That Parry was fired up by the example of Wagnerian declamation is evident in the two major monologues for Prometheus (who is the main focus of Part I). Clearly, his experience of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* had left its mark, but other works, such as *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and *Tannhäuser* (notably in the triumphal hymn

'Pour forth heav'n's wine'), were inspirations for Jupiter's monologue in Part II, while *Lohengrin* and *Die Walküre* were important influences in the music for the Spirit of the Hour, an enchanting reverie. These two movements and the Chorus of Furies (a vigorous and inventive sonata structure) also demonstrate amply Parry's appetite for colourful orchestration. Imaginative instrumentation is a feature of the more consolatory intermezzo for Mother Earth ('I felt thy torture, son') as well, which, especially in its rich duo for cellos, is reminiscent of Brahms's *Deutsches Requiem* (a work that Parry had heard for the first time in 1875), and of the felicitous female Chorus of Spirits which follows. The intermezzo is then reworked in the finale of Part I for all four soloists and chorus ('Life of Life!'), the last stanza of which is almost operatic in manner and effect, and the music of the Chorus of Spirits is revisited in the finale of Part II. Yet, notwithstanding these potent modern German influences, the voice of Parry himself is evident throughout in terms of his instinct for the vocal rhythms of the English language. Moreover, there are striking moments of Parry's 'Englishness' in the characteristic use of diatonic harmony. This harmonic palette Parry reserved specially for

the emotional epicentre of the work, the scene with the Spirit of the Hour ('and men walked one with another'), and for the grand choral architecture of Part II.

#### **Blest Pair of Sirens**

Parry composed his setting of John Milton's Ode *At a Solemn Musick*, better known today as *Blest Pair of Sirens*, in response to a commission from Stanford and the London Bach Choir for Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, in 1887. Having suffered the crushing blow of seeing his opera, *Guenever*, rejected by Carl Rosa, in 1886, he was in need of something to restore his confidence. Much of *Blest Pair* was composed at Wilton House, near Salisbury, the former home of his wife, Maude Herbert. The work was completed in draft by 13 January and dispatched to Stanford. On 29 March, Parry, along with Grove, Joachim, and Frederick Bridge, attended a rehearsal; Parry recounted in his diary:

At the end old G. jumped up with tears in his eyes and shook me over and over again by the hand and the whole choir took up the cue... and applauded vociferously.

The first performance took place at St James's Hall on 17 May 1887 and was greeted with

shouts of enthusiasm from performers and audience alike. It was the success Parry craved, though he was at that time surely unaware that he had authored what would prove a classic of the English choral repertoire.

Various key factors contributed to the triumph of *Blest Pair*. One was Parry's tight musical organisation which reflects the Pindaric model of Milton's poetical design – the opening 'strophe' ('Blest pair of Sirens'), the opposing 'antistrophe' ('Jarr'd against nature's chime'), and the aspirational 'epode' ('O may we soon again renew that song'). Another was the carefully controlled 'concerto' structure whereby the opening orchestral material returns at strategic moments as a 'ritornello', especially at the end where it gives rise to one of Parry's most epigrammatic choral statements. Other seminal stylistic elements include the muscular nature of Parry's musical ideas, in particular the bracing orchestral opening which, in paraphrasing the beginning of the Prelude to *Die Meistersinger*, shows how thoroughly Parry had assimilated Wagner to form his own individual style. The same might be said of the dramatic use of the 'Tristan' chord (producing a 'harsh din') which acts as a critical fulcrum within the work. Melodically, Parry's orchestral

introduction also makes passing reference to the falling seventh that will flavour the epode's yearning theme. Much of the dissonant diatonic harmony looks forward to the luxuriant sonorities of the eight-part choral counterpoint which not only characterises so much of the work's noble sentiment but also confirms another powerful influence in the complex equation of Parry's musical personality, that of J.S. Bach.

*Blest Pair of Sirens* had many admirers, among them Elgar and Vaughan Williams. The latter came to know and love the work as a schoolboy at Charterhouse and it remained a national choral monument for him for the rest of his life. Elgar became acquainted with the work as an orchestral violinist, at the end of the 1880s, and played it several times under Parry's direction. Elgar eagerly declared it to be 'one of the noblest works of man' and, in consequence of his high regard for *Blest Pair* (as well as for *Judith* and *Job*), in his Birmingham inaugural lecture paid Parry the ultimate tribute by proclaiming that

no cloud of formality can dim the  
healthy sympathy and broad influence he  
exerts and we hope may long continue to  
exert upon us.

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### **Scenes from Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound': Synopsis**

Part I of Parry's cantata is drawn mainly from Act I of Shelley's lyrical drama. At the opening, Prometheus is pictured in a ravine of icy rocks in the Indian Caucasus; there he has been bound to the precipice by Jupiter as punishment for his advocacy of mankind's freedom; more immediately ominous for Jupiter, Prometheus has also learned, and refused to reveal, that the downfall of Jupiter will be brought about by his own child. After Prometheus has lamented his fate and predicament, though stoically willing to accept both, Mercury arrives with an ultimatum. If Prometheus will not divulge his secret, he will be delivered to the Furies. Prometheus refuses to yield and the Furies are summoned. A sympathetic voice emanates from Mother Earth who invokes the Chorus of Spirits and from these Prometheus draws some spiritual comfort, a sentiment captured in lines from Act II, Scene 5, 'Life of life! thy lips enkindle'.

In Part II of the cantata, which consists of two scenes, the first is taken from Act III. Here Jupiter is depicted on his throne on Mount Olympus with Thetis and other Deities assembled. Initially Jupiter displays a mood of supreme confidence in his own powers, but he

counsels the other gods to beware the threat of man. Convinced that Demogorgon, his destined child and the exemplification of the world's primal power, will extinguish the soul of mankind, he dismisses any notion of danger or risk. The Car of the Hour arrives and with it Demogorgon, who cannot be fully seen or comprehended by Jupiter. Bewildered, Jupiter demands his identity, to which Demogorgon replies that he is Jupiter's child, as Jupiter was Saturn's child before him. Their destiny is an eternity in darkness together, for which they must sink into the abyss. At this point, Hercules unbinds Prometheus, and the Spirit of the Hour rejoices at the expunction of Jupiter's tyranny. Part II, Scene 2, selected from Shelley's Act IV, is situated in a part of the forest near the Cave of Prometheus. It is a hymn of jubilation on the part of the Spirits and Hours and a paean of elation at the new-found liberty of Prometheus.

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Educated at the Giggleswick School, the University of London, and Royal College of Music, the soprano **Sarah Fox** is a winner of the Kathleen Ferrier Award and the John Christie Award, and an Honorary Fellow of Royal Holloway College, the University



of London. At The Royal Opera, Covent Garden, her roles have included Micaëla (*Carmen*), Asteria (*Tamerlano*), Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*), and Woglinde (*Der Ring des Nibelungen*). She has sung Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*) at Glyndebourne Festival Opera and The Royal Danish Opera, and Mimi (*La bohème*) at Opera North, her repertoire also including Ellen Orford (*Peter Grimes*), Servilia (*La clemenza di Tito*), and Ilia (*Idomeneo*). She has appeared in concert in Denver, Hong Kong, Melbourne, Minneapolis, New York, San Francisco, Tel Aviv, and Tokyo, and on tour throughout the UK and the European continent. She works with many of the world's leading orchestras, including the Basque National Orchestra, Berliner Philharmoniker, Camerata Salzburg, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Colorado Symphony, Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Gulbenkian Orchestra, Hallé, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano Giuseppe Verdi, and Oslo Philharmonic. She is a frequent visitor to the BBC Proms, Edinburgh International Festival, and Three Choirs Festival, and a regular guest with Classical Opera and at Wigmore Hall, London. She has performed frequently with John Wilson and his

Orchestra, is a regular guest on BBC Radio 2's *Friday Night Is Music Night* and has performed concerts with Rufus Wainwright in Europe and Hong Kong. Sarah Fox has built a substantial discography, which includes recordings of the role of Aminta (Mozart's *Il re pastore*), songs by Poulenc, *The Cole Porter Songbook*, Mahler's Symphony No. 4 with the Philharmonia Orchestra under Sir Charles Mackerras and under Lorin Maazel, *That's Entertainment* with the John Wilson Orchestra under John Wilson, *English Lyrics* by Parry, Mozart's Requiem with the London Mozart Players under Malcolm Archer, and Vaughan Williams's *A Sea Symphony* with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic under Andrew Manze.

Born in County Durham, the mezzo-soprano **Dame Sarah Connolly** studied piano and singing at the Royal College of Music, of which she is now a Fellow. Among many other roles she has sung Dido (*Dido and Aeneas*) at Teatro alla Scala, Milan and The Royal Opera, Covent Garden; the Composer (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), Clairon (*Capriccio*), and Gertrude (Brett Dean's *Hamlet*) at The Metropolitan Opera, New York; Orfeo (*Orfeo ed Euridice*) and the title role in *The Rape of Lucretia* at Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich;

the title role in *Giulio Cesare* and Phèdre (*Hippolyte et Aricie*) at Glyndebourne Festival Opera; Brangäne (*Tristan und Isolde*) at The Royal Opera, Glyndebourne Festival, Gran Teatre del Liceu, Barcelona, and Festspielhaus Baden-Baden; the title role in *Ariodante* and Sesto (*La clemenza di Tito*) at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence; Phèdre at Opéra national de Paris; the title role in *Ariodante* for De Nationale Opera and Wiener Staatsoper; Fricka (*Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*) at The Royal Opera and Bayreuther Festspiele; and Ježibaba (*Rusalka*) at The Royal Opera. She has also made frequent appearances at Scottish Opera, Welsh National Opera, Opera North, and, particularly, English National Opera. Regularly partnered by Eugene Asti, Julius Drake, Malcolm Martineau, and Joseph Middleton, she has appeared in recital in London, New York, Boston, Paris, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, San Francisco, Atlanta, and Stuttgart; at the BBC Proms, Incontri in Terra di Siena at La Foce, and Schubertiada de Vilabertran; and at the Aldeburgh, Cheltenham, Edinburgh, and Oxford Lieder festivals. In concert she has performed at the Aldeburgh, Edinburgh, Lucerne, Salzburg, and Tanglewood festivals, and she is a frequent guest at the BBC Proms where, in 2009, she was a memorable guest soloist at the

Last Night. She has appeared regularly with many of the world's great orchestras under conductors such as Ivor Bolton, Sir Colin Davis, Sir Mark Elder, Daniel Harding, Philippe Herreweghe, Vladimir Jurowski, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Riccardo Chailly, and Sir Simon Rattle. Sarah Connolly has recorded prolifically and twice been nominated for a Grammy Award. She was made a DBE in the 2017 Birthday Honours, having been made a CBE in the 2010 New Year Honours, and in 2012 received the Singer Award of the Royal Philharmonic Society in recognition of her outstanding services to music.

One of the most exciting British tenors today, **David Butt Philip** is quickly becoming a firm favourite on the major international stages. An alumnus of the Jette Parker Young Artist Programme, he made recent débuts in the title role of *Der Zwerg* at Deutsche Oper Berlin, as Florestan (*Fidelio*) at The Royal Opera, Covent Garden, and as Bacchus (*Ariadne auf Naxos*) at the Edinburgh International Festival, to critical and public acclaim. He recently made his début also at Wiener Staatsoper with a triple appearance: as Laca (*Jenůfa*), Walther von Stolzing (Keith Warner's new production of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*), and Don José (Calixto Bieito's production

of *Carmen*). He made his début at San Francisco Opera as Der Kaiser (David Hockney's new production of *Die Frau ohne Schatten*), conducted by Sir Donald Runnicles, and returned to The Royal Opera as the Prince (Natalie Abrahams and Ann Yee's staging of *Rusalka*). He made his débuts at The Metropolitan Opera as both Grigory (*Boris Godunov*) and Laertes (the American première of Brett Dean's *Hamlet*), at Washington National Opera in a series of celebratory concerts conducted by Evan Rogister, and at the Salzburger Festspiele as Boris (*Kát'a Kabanová*). He has sung Boris also at Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Lohengrin at Deutsche Oper Berlin, Bacchus at Bayerische Staatsoper, Brett Dean's Hamlet at Oper Köln, Froh (*Das Rheingold*) and Essex (*Gloriana*) at Teatro Real, Madrid, Erik (*Der fliegende Holländer*) at Opéra de Lille, Narraboth (*Salomé*) at The Royal Opera, Florestan at the National Theatre, Prague, Rodolfo (*La bohème*), Don José, and Pinkerton (*Madama Butterfly*) at English National Opera, Count Vaudémont (Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta*) and Folco (Mascagni's *Isabeau*) at Opera Holland Park, and Laca and Luigi (*Il tabarro*) at Opera North. On the concert platform, he made his début at the

Spring Festival, Tokyo, as Stolzing and joined the London Philharmonic Orchestra under Edward Gardner in Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder*. David Butt Philip has appeared in concert at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, Wiener Musikverein, Royal Festival Hall, and Barbican, and performed with the Philharmonia Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Hallé, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Boston Symphony Orchestra, and Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra, Tokyo, under conductors such as Vladimir Ashkenazy, Sir Mark Elder, Vladimir Jurowski, and Sir Antonio Pappano.

The bass-baritone **Neal Davies** studied at King's College, London and the Royal Academy of Music and in 1991 won the Lieder Prize at the Cardiff Singer of the World Competition. He has appeared in concert with the Oslo Philharmonic, Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Hallé, Cleveland Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Orquesta Nacional de España, and Wiener Philharmoniker, with David Afkham, Ivor Bolton, Pierre Boulez, Frans Brüggen, William

Christie, Sir Andrew Davis, Christoph von Dohnányi, Sir Mark Elder, Edward Gardner, Daniel Harding, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, René Jacobs, Mariss Jansons, Stephen Layton, Paul McCreesh, and Jonathan Nott. He is a regular guest at the Edinburgh International Festival, BBC Proms, and with Les Violons du Roy under Bernard Labadie and Jonathan Cohen. He has sung Figaro (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Alaska Wolf Joe (*Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*), and in *Giulio Cesare* at The Royal Opera, Covent Garden, and Zebul (*Jephtha*), Publio (*La clemenza di Tito*), Ariodates (*Xerxes*), Dr Kolenatý (*The Makropulos Case*), Garibaldo (*Rodelinda*), Antigonus and Shepherd (Ryan Wigglesworth's *A Winter's Tale*), and in a production of Handel's *L'Allegro, il penseroso ed il moderato* at English National Opera. Neal Davies also performs with Welsh National Opera, Scottish Opera, Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin, Opera di Roma, and Lyric Opera of Chicago, and has appeared in performances of Charpentier's *David et Jonathas* at Aix-en-Provence. His large discography includes a recording of *Billy Budd* with Daniel Harding, which won a Grammy award.

Founded in 1984, **Crouch End Festival Chorus** (CEFC) has established a reputation

as one of the country's leading symphonic choirs, frequently commended for its communicative power and versatility. Under David Temple MBE, its musical director and co-founder, the choir gives concerts that illuminate the choral world with imaginative and bold programming, in which established choral classics are mixed with contemporary works of great variety and innovation. The Chorus is much in demand among the top orchestras in the UK and performs regularly for the BBC, most recently at the opening of the BBC Proms in 2022, in Verdi's *Messa da Requiem* under Sakari Oramo. Other maestros who have conducted the Chorus include Edward Gardner, Semyon Bychkov, François-Xavier Roth, and Esa-Pekka Salonen. The Chorus has also worked with musicians from the rock and pop world and with television and film composers. Recent highlights include recording the Grammy-nominated soundtrack for *Rocketman*, the film about the life of Elton John, with the producer Giles Martin, and the music for the TV series *Good Omens*, with the composer David Arnold. The Chorus has also toured with Noel Gallagher, performed on the main, Pyramid Stage at Glastonbury with Ray Davies, and enjoyed regular collaborations with Hans Zimmer, Danny Elfman, and the

late Ennio Morricone. The discography of Crouch End Festival Chorus for Chandos Records includes the first recording for forty-five years of J.S. Bach's St John Passion sung in English, and Parry's *Judith*, under William Vann. [www.cefc.org.uk](http://www.cefc.org.uk)

Do not let the name mislead you – **London Mozart Players** is an ensemble that does not just play in London, and it certainly does not just play Mozart! As well as maintaining residencies at Fairfield Halls, in Croydon, St John the Evangelist, in Upper Norwood, and Opus Theatre, in Hastings, it has acquired international renown for working with many of the world's greatest conductors and soloists. It has developed a reputation for making and playing adventurous, ambitious, and accessible music, and for being at the forefront of embedding arts and culture into the life of local communities across the UK and beyond. The orchestra works with schools and music hubs around the UK and abroad to inspire the next generation of musicians and music lovers. It continues its long tradition of promoting young talent – Nicola Benedetti, Jacqueline du Pré, and Yan Pascal Tortelier are just three of many musical virtuosi championed early in their careers. In 2021, the violin virtuoso Leia Zhu was appointed as

Young Artist-in-Residence: this is a nurturing and collaborative relationship to encourage her young talent. After celebrating its seventieth anniversary in 2019, the orchestra soon found itself navigating orchestral life during the pandemic; it created an award-winning digital concert series which reached millions of people, thereby reaffirming its commitment to its audiences. Having opened Croydon's Borough of Culture in April 2023, London Mozart Players will continue to host its own concerts and events throughout the next year.

A multiple-prize winning and critically acclaimed conductor and accompanist, equally at home on the podium and at the piano, **William Vann** is the founder and Artistic Director of the London English Song Festival. He is a passionate advocate for neglected works of British music and proud to have spearheaded the Festival's project to revive and record Hubert Parry's oratorio *Judith*, the performance of which, at the Royal Festival Hall, was described by *Seen and Heard International* as 'an unalloyed triumph for William Vann... he had complete command of the score and evident belief in the music'. Born in Bedford, he was a Chorister at King's College, Cambridge

and a Music Scholar at Bedford School. He subsequently read law and took up a choral scholarship at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, where he was taught the piano by Peter Uppard; at the Royal Academy of Music he studied piano accompaniment with Malcolm Martineau and Colin Stone. He has been awarded many prizes for his piano accompaniment, including the Jean Meikle Prize for a Duo (with Johnny Herford) at the Wigmore Hall Song Competition, Gerald Moore Award, and Accompanists' Award of the Royal Over-Seas League.

William Vann has collaborated throughout the world and on disc with a vast array of singers and instrumentalists, among them Sir Thomas Allen CBE, Mary Bevan, Katie Bray, David Butt Philip, Allan Clayton, Dame Sarah Connolly, Neal Davies, Sarah Fox, James Gilchrist, Thomas Gould,

Johnny Herford, Guy Johnston, Jennifer Johnston, Jack Liebeck, Njabulo Madlala, Aoife Miskelly, Ann Murray DBE, Matthew Rose, Brindley Sherratt, Nicky Spence, Toby Spence, Andrew Staples, Kitty Whately, Roderick Williams, the Navarra Quartet, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Academy of Ancient Music, Britten Sinfonia, and London Mozart Players. He is the Director of Music at the Royal Hospital Chelsea, an Associate of the RAM, a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists, a Trustee of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society, a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Musicians, a Chairman of Kensington and Chelsea Music Society, Artistic Director of Bedford Music Club, Musical Director of Dulwich Choral Society, and a regular conductor and vocal coach at the Dartington and Oxenford International Summer schools.



Paul Robinson

Crouch End Festival Chorus, with its musical director, David Temple MBE

## Parry: Scènes de “Prometheus Unbound” de Shelley / Blest Pair of Sirens

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### Scènes de “Prometheus Unbound” de Shelley

En cherchant un point de départ concret pour quelque chose qui pourrait être utilement considéré par rapport à la musique d'aujourd'hui, je pense qu'il est inutile de remonter plus loin qu'en 1880. Je ne dis absolument pas qu'il s'agit du meilleur point de départ, mais il est suffisant aux fins présentes... Certains d'entre nous qui, en cette année-là, étaient jeunes et participaient activement à la musique – avec vraiment un rôle actif comme jouer dans des orchestres – sentaient que quelque chose allait enfin survenir en matière de composition dans l'école anglaise.

Ces mots furent prononcés à l'occasion du cours inaugural d'Edward Elgar comme professeur de musique de la chaire Peyton à l'Université de Birmingham, le 16 mars 1905. Énigmatique, Elgar ne fit jamais spécifiquement référence à un compositeur particulier ou à une œuvre précise dans son cours, mais le fait qu'il ait choisi 1880 comme “point de départ” permet de penser que le

violoniste en herbe de vingt-trois ans qu'il était connaissait très probablement la nouvelle œuvre chorale de Hubert Parry (1848 – 1918) qui lui avait été commandée pour le Festival des Trois Chœurs de Gloucester de 1880. La déclaration d'Elgar était antérieure à celle d'Ernest Walker, dans *A History of Music in England*, de 1907, selon lequel:

Si l'on recherche un anniversaire précis pour la musique moderne anglaise, le 7 septembre 1880, lorsque *Prometheus* vit le jour à Gloucester et reçut un accueil nettement mitigé, est sans aucun doute la meilleure date.

Depuis lors, d'autres personnes, comme Francis Hueffer, W.H. Hadow, Thomas Dunhill, A.E.F. Dickinson, Herbert Howells et Frank Howes, ont réitéré ce point de vue.

En 1880, Parry avait trente-deux ans et était au début de sa carrière de compositeur. Diplômé d'Oxford, en 1870, il travaillait au Registre maritime de la Lloyd comme assureur, mais il pensait en permanence à la musique. Lorsqu'il s'avéra impossible d'étudier avec Brahms, il se tourna vers le pianiste virtuose, érudit et fervent défenseur



de Wagner, l'Alsacien Edward Dannreuther, qui vivait à Londres, et prit avec lui des leçons de piano; avec le temps, l'éclectisme et l'intuition de Dannreuther en matière musicale, ainsi que le forum de ses brillantes séries de concerts semi-privés donnés chez lui, 12, Orme Square, à Bayswater, devinrent en fait un milieu pour étudier et discuter de la musique contemporaine européenne. Qui plus est, Dannreuther, qui resta le mentor de Parry jusqu'à sa mort en 1905, devint peut-être le critique le plus incisif des propres compositions de Parry. En 1876, c'est lui qui obtint des billets gratuits pour Parry afin qu'il assiste au deuxième cycle de *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, à Bayreuth. Parry y rencontra Wagner à Wahnfried, et une seconde rencontre, plus longue, avec ce dernier eut lieu en 1877 au cours du Festival Wagner de Londres, où Wagner compta parmi les invités des Dannreuther, à Orme Square. En outre, la vénération de Dannreuther pour Brahms joua un rôle essentiel dans la composition d'œuvres de musique de chambre importantes de Parry (toutes écrites pour être exécutées à Orme Square) et, en 1880, Dannreuther allait aussi se produire deux fois en soliste (sous la direction d'August Manns et de Hans Richter) dans l'audacieux Concerto pour piano en fa dièse majeur de Parry.

C'est avant la création du Concerto pour piano que Parry commença à envisager un texte pour sa première commande majeure du Festival des Trois Chœurs de Gloucester. L'année précédente, il avait été attiré par le drame lyrique en quatre actes de Shelley *Prometheus Unbound* (Prométhée délivré; 1820), d'après la tragédie d'Eschyle *Prométhée enchaîné*. "Psychodrame" philosophique majeur, il incarne de nombreux attributs qui ont de forts parallèles avec le *Ring* de Wagner, des parallèles que Bernard Shaw nota dans *The Perfect Wagnerite*. Selon Shaw, les deux œuvres

exposent le même conflit entre  
l'humanité et ses dieux et  
gouvernements, au cours duquel  
l'homme se délivre de leur tyrannie,  
grâce au libre développement de sa  
volonté qui lui donne la force et la  
confiance en soi nécessaires.

C'est ce sentiment que Parry désirait distiller dans sa cantate, même s'il était naturellement impératif de sélectionner les parties du texte de Shelley qui projetteraient le "message" aussi clairement que possible. Il en résulta la construction d'une cantate en deux parties, la première composée d'une longue scène (mais, en réalité, en deux sections), la seconde de deux scènes bien délimitées. Le 21 mars 1880,

Parry était très excité à l'idée de présenter à Dannreuther ce qu'il envisageait comme les "deux premières scènes" de la première partie (qui étaient fort probablement le monologue initial de Prométhée et le Chœur des Furies), mais il fut incapable de reprendre le travail avant mai. Au milieu du mois de juillet, il avait plus ou moins achevé le chœur final, mais il trouva cette section de l'œuvre particulièrement difficile.

Après un retard angoissant dans la copie des parties d'orchestre et de chœur, la longue répétition à Gloucester, le 6 septembre, veille de la représentation, commença à dix heures et se poursuivit jusqu'à dix-sept heures; après une pause de deux heures et demie, la répétition reprit à dix-neuf heures trente et se poursuivit jusqu'à minuit. Les matériaux d'exécution étaient criblés d'erreurs et les parties chorales manuscrites – une pour chaque voix séparée (au lieu du luxe d'une partition vocale imprimée) – rendirent encore plus lourde la tâche du chœur, qui n'était pas familiarisé avec le langage moderne. Le chœur de 250 voix, venant de Gloucester, mais aussi de Londres, Bristol, Oxford et Huddersfield, était mis à l'épreuve, et c'est surtout grâce au contingent de Huddersfield, qui organisa une répétition privée le matin du 7 septembre, que le moral du chœur remonta. Lors de

l'exécution de la soirée, au Shire Hall, où avaient lieu les concerts de musique profane, certaines sections se passèrent bien, mais d'autres, notamment le Chorus of Spirits (Chœur des Esprits), dans la première partie, et la scène de Jupiter, dans la seconde partie, connurent d'importants incidents. Grâce en grande partie au beau chant de la soprano, Anna Williams, dans le rôle du Spirit of the Hour (l'Esprit de l'Heure), Parry retrouva son optimisme.

La presse eut des réactions très variées à *Prometheus*. Hueffer et Shaw, tous deux enthousiastes wagnériens, furent très admiratifs; pour d'autres ce fut la présence même de l'influence wagnérienne qui engendra leur antipathie véhémente. Cette négativité fut peut-être le mieux résumée par le critique du *Musical Times*, qui déclara que  
dans beaucoup de parties, nous avons  
isolé des phrases d'une réelle beauté;  
mais elles sont très rares.

La réaction du violon solo de l'orchestre du festival, le violoniste français Prosper Sainton, résuma néanmoins la polarité des impressions lorsqu'il écrivit à Charles Harford Lloyd (chef d'orchestre du Festival de Gloucester et dédicataire de l'œuvre):

Permettez moi d'ajouter un petit mot  
pour vous dire que "Prometheus" m'a

profondément, très profondément impressionné. Il y a l'«étincelle électrique» si rare de nos jours. Avec une belle exécution très au point, l'œuvre de M. Parry doit vraiment faire sensation.

Mais l'aversion pour *Prometheus* continua, avec le refus de Stanley Lucas de le publier. Parry écrivit dans son journal intime: "N'étant pas dans mon assiette, et fatigué, j'ai accusé le coup." Charles Villiers Stanford (dont Parry avait fait la connaissance en 1877) s'engouffra dans la brèche et exprima le désir de l'interpréter à Cambridge en 1881, et cette initiative positive semble avoir poussé Novello à publier une réduction piano-chant. Grâce à cette dernière et avec davantage de temps de répétition, l'exécution de Stanford et de la Musical Society de l'Université de Cambridge, le 17 mai 1881, fut un triomphe. L'intérêt pour cette œuvre fut également important lorsque, après avoir reçu un doctorat honoris causa en musique de l'Université, Parry la dirigea au Sheldonian Theatre d'Oxford, le 21 mai 1884. *Prometheus* fut aussi donné par le London Bach Choir sous la direction d'Otto Goldschmidt, le 19 novembre 1885 (les vieilles hostilités wagnériennes semblent s'être réveillées à cette occasion) et elle fut chantée à nouveau, par le même chœur sous la direction de

Stanford, le 24 mars 1899. Depuis lors, toutefois, et malgré son statut séculaire dans l'histoire de la musique en Angleterre, elle souffre d'un désintérêt presque total. Elle n'a été reprise que le 9 septembre 1980, par la BBC (grâce au travail de l'un de ses producteurs, Michael Pope), pour marquer le centenaire de sa création, à Gloucester; elle fut interprétée devant un public invité par le Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, les BBC Singers et des solistes sous la baguette de Vernon Handley. Cette exécution fut ensuite diffusée, le 24 septembre, sur BBC Radio 3. Mais c'est seulement aujourd'hui, quarante-trois ans après cette diffusion révolutionnaire, que *Prometheus* finit par faire l'objet d'un enregistrement commercial, qui nous permet enfin d'entendre et de mesurer l'énergie, l'éclat et la portée historique de la première œuvre chorale majeure de Parry.

L'une des caractéristiques les plus fascinantes des *Scenes from Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound"* est peut-être son exubérance grisante. À trente-deux ans, Parry n'était plus guère un jeune homme, mais son évolution musicale avait suivi une progression dans laquelle il n'avait découvert et assimilé la musique allemande moderne qu'à la fin des années 1870; et, en ce sens, sa cantate, qui est essentiellement le fruit

de sa première poussée de maturité, avait une sorte de verve juvénile contagieuse. On peut le ressentir dans le prélude saisissant de l'œuvre, une évocation tragique du paysage désolé et du châtimement sévère de Prométhée, notamment dans son *fugato* troublant aux cordes en sourdine (qui donne lieu à une harmonie très expérimentale), et dans le matériau crucial tristanesque pour les bois et les cuivres, qui constitue une part importante de la musique pour quatuor vocal solo dans le finale de la seconde partie. Le fait que Parry ait été enthousiasmé par l'exemple de la déclamation wagnérienne est manifeste dans les deux monologues majeurs de Prométhée (qui est le principal centre d'intérêt de la première partie). Manifestement, son expérience du *Ring des Nibelungen* avait laissé son empreinte, mais d'autres œuvres, comme *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* et *Tannhäuser* (notamment dans l'hymne triomphal "Pour forth heav'n's wine" [Versez le vin des cieux]), furent des sources d'inspiration pour le monologue de Jupiter dans la seconde partie, alors que *Lobengrin* et *Die Walküre* constituèrent des influences importantes dans la musique pour l'Esprit de l'Heure, une rêverie merveilleuse. Ces deux mouvements et le Chœur des Furies (une structure de sonate vigoureuse et inventive)

démontrent aussi largement le goût de Parry pour une orchestration haute en couleur. L'intermezzo plus réconfortant pour Mother Earth (Mère Terre; "I felt thy torture, son") est aussi caractérisé par une instrumentation imaginative, surtout dans son riche duo pour violoncelles qui fait penser au *Deutsches Requiem* de Brahms (une œuvre que Parry avait entendue pour la première fois en 1875) et l'heureux Chœur féminin des Esprits qui suit. L'intermezzo est ensuite retravaillé dans le finale de la première partie pour les quatre solistes et le chœur ("Life of Life!"), dont la dernière strophe est presque lyrique dans sa manière et son effet, et la musique du Chœur des Esprits est revisitée dans le finale de la seconde partie. Pourtant, en dépit de ces fortes influences allemandes modernes, la voix de Parry lui-même est évidente du début à la fin, en ce qui concerne son instinct pour les rythmes vocaux de la langue anglaise. En outre, il y a des moments frappants du "caractère typiquement anglais" de Parry dans l'usage spécifique de l'harmonie diatonique. Cette palette harmonique Parry la réserva particulièrement à l'épicentre émotionnel de l'œuvre, la scène avec l'Esprit de l'Heure ("and men walked one with another") et à la grandiose architecture chorale de la seconde partie.

### **Blest Pair of Sirens**

Parry composa sa musique sur l'ode *At a Solemn Musick* de John Milton, plus connue aujourd'hui sous le titre *Blest Pair of Sirens*, en réponse à une commande de Stanford et du London Bach Choir pour le jubilé d'or de la reine Victoria, en 1887. Après avoir subi le coup dur de voir son opéra *Guenever* refusé par Carl Rosa, en 1886, il avait besoin de quelque chose pour reprendre confiance. Une grande partie de *Blest Pair* fut composée à Wilton House, près de Salisbury, ancienne demeure de sa femme, Maude Herbert. L'esquisse de cette œuvre fut achevée le 13 janvier et expédiée à Stanford. Le 29 mars, Parry assista, avec Grove, Joachim et Frederick Bridge, à une répétition; Parry raconta dans son journal intime:

À la fin, le vieux G. s'est levé d'un bond les larmes aux yeux et m'a secoué à maintes reprises par la main et tout le chœur a suivi son geste... et a applaudi avec véhémence.

La première exécution eut lieu à St James's Hall le 17 mai 1887 et fut accueillie par des cris d'enthousiasme des interprètes comme de l'auditoire. Ce fut le succès dont Parry avait grand besoin, même si, à cette époque, il ne savait sûrement pas qu'il avait écrit ce qui allait s'avérer être un classique du répertoire choral anglais.

Divers facteurs clés contribuèrent au triomphe de *Blest Pair of Sirens*. D'une part l'organisation musicale rigoureuse de Parry qui reflète le modèle pindarique de la conception poétique de Milton – la première “strophe” (“Blest pair of Sirens”), l’“antistrophe” opposée (“Jar'd against nature's chime”), et l’“épode” ambitieuse (“O may we soon again renew that song”). Un autre facteur est la structure “concerto” soigneusement maîtrisée par laquelle le matériau orchestral initial revient à des moments stratégiques comme un “ritornello”, surtout à la fin où il donne lieu à l'une des déclarations chorales les plus épigrammatiques de Parry. Parmi d'autres éléments stylistiques déterminants, il y a la nature musclée des idées musicales de Parry, en particulier le début orchestral vivifiant qui, en paraphrasant le début du prélude de *Die Meistersinger*, montre à quel point Parry avait parfaitement assimilé Wagner pour élaborer son propre style personnel. On pourrait en dire autant de l'utilisation dramatique de l'accord de “Tristan” (produisant un “rude vacarme”) qui sert de pivot déterminant au sein de l'œuvre. Sur le plan mélodique, l'introduction orchestrale de Parry fait aussi brièvement référence à la septième descendante qui donnera un certain parfum au thème plein de tendresse de l'épode. Une grande partie de

l'harmonie diatonique dissonante anticipe les sonorités luxuriantes du contrepoint choral à huit voix si caractéristique non seulement de la noble sentimentalité de cette œuvre, mais qui confirme aussi une autre influence importante dans l'équation complexe de la personnalité musicale de Parry, celle de J.S. Bach.

*Blest Pair of Sirens* eut de nombreux admirateurs, notamment Elgar et Vaughan Williams. Ce dernier découvrit cette œuvre et l'aima lorsqu'il était élève à Charterhouse et elle resta pour lui un monument choral jusqu'à la fin de sa vie. Elgar en est venu à bien connaître cette œuvre comme violoniste d'orchestre, à la fin des années 1880, et la joua plusieurs fois sous la direction de Parry. Elgar déclara avec enthousiasme qu'elle était "l'une des œuvres les plus nobles de l'homme" et, il témoigna de son très grand respect pour *Blest Pair of Sirens* (ainsi que pour *Judith et Job*) dans son cours inaugural de Birmingham, lorsqu'il rendit à Parry un hommage suprême en proclamant que

aucune ombre de formalisme ne peut ternir la saine sympathie et la grande influence qu'il exerce et qu'il continuera longtemps, nous l'espérons, à exercer sur nous.

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### Scènes de "Prometheus Unbound" de Shelley: Synopsis

La première partie de la cantate de Parry est essentiellement tirée de l'acte I du drame lyrique de Shelley. Au début, Prométhée est représenté dans un ravin de rochers glacés dans le Caucase indien; il a été enchaîné au précipice par Jupiter en guise de châtiment pour avoir défendu la liberté de l'humanité; plus directement menaçant à l'égard de Jupiter, Prométhée a aussi appris et refusé de révéler que la chute de Jupiter sera provoquée par son propre enfant. Après que Prométhée ait déploré son sort et sa situation difficile, tout en étant disposé stoïquement à accepter les deux, Mercure arrive avec un ultimatum. Si Prométhée refuse de divulguer son secret, il sera livré aux Furies. Prométhée refuse de céder et les Furies sont convoquées. Une voix compatissante émane de Mère Terre qui invoque le Chœur des Esprits, dont Prométhée tire un certain réconfort spirituel, un sentiment rendu dans des vers de l'acte II, scène 5, "Life of life! thy lips enkindle".

Dans la seconde partie de la cantate, qui se compose de deux scènes, la première est empruntée à l'acte III. Ici, Jupiter est dépeint sur son trône sur le Mont Olympe avec Thétis et d'autres dieux rassemblés. Au départ, Jupiter fait preuve d'une suprême confiance

en sa propre puissance, mais il conseille aux autres dieux de se méfier de la menace de l'homme. Convaincu que Démogorgon, le fils que le destin lui a donné et l'exemplification de la puissance primitive du monde, anéantira l'âme de l'humanité, il écarte toute notion de danger ou de risque. Le Char de l'Heure arrive et avec lui Démogorgon, que Jupiter ne peut complètement voir ou comprendre. Déconcerté, Jupiter lui demande son identité; Démogorgon répond qu'il est le fils de Jupiter, comme Jupiter était le fils de Saturne avant lui. Leur destinée est une éternité dans les

ténèbres, raison pour laquelle ils doivent sombrer dans les abysses. Hercule délie alors Prométhée, et l'Esprit de l'Heure se réjouit de l'anéantissement de la tyrannie de Jupiter. La seconde partie, scène 2, empruntée à l'acte IV de Shelley, se situe dans une partie de la forêt, près de la Grotte de Prométhée. C'est un hymne de réjouissance de la part des Esprits et des Heures et un hymne de joie à la toute nouvelle liberté de Prométhée.

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London Mozart Players, 2017





**Mercury (Tenor)**

If thou might'st dwell among the Gods the while  
Lapp'd in voluptuous joy?

**Prometheus (Baritone)**

I would not quit  
This bleak ravine, these unrepentant pains.

**Mercury (Tenor)**

Alas! I wonder at, yet pity thee.

**Prometheus (Baritone)**

Pity the self-despising slaves of Heav'n,  
Not me, within whose mind sits peace serene,  
As light in the sun, thrond: how vain is talk!  
Call up the fiends.

**Mercury (Tenor)**

I must obey his words and thine: alas!  
Most heavily remorse hangs at my heart!

**Chorus of Furies**

6 Prometheus!  
Immortal Titan!  
Champion of Heaven's slaves!

From the ends of the earth, from the ends of  
the earth,  
Where the night has its grave, and the morning  
its birth,  
Come, come, come!  
Oh, ye who shake hills with the scream of your  
mirth,

When cities sink howling in ruin; and ye  
Who with wingless footsteps trample the sea,  
And close upon Shipwreck and Famine's track,  
Sit chattering with joy on the foodless wreck;

Come, come, come!

Leave the bed, low, cold, and red,  
Strewed beneath a nation dead;  
Leave the hatred, as in ashes  
Fire is left for future burning:  
It will burst in bloodier flashes  
When ye stir it, soon returning:  
Leave the self-contempt implanted  
In young spirits, sense-enchanted,  
Misery's yet unkindled fuel:  
Leave Hell's secrets half unchanted  
To the maniac dreamer; cruel  
More than ye can be with hate

Is he with fear.

Come, come, come!

The pale stars of morn  
Shine on a misery, dire to be borne.  
Dost thou faint, mighty Titan? We laugh thee  
to scorn.

Joy, joy, joy!

Past ages crowd on thee, but each one remembers;  
And the future is dark, and the present is spread  
Like a pillow of thorns for thy slumberless head.

**No. 2**

**The Earth (Mezzo-soprano)**

7 I felt thy torture, son; with such mixed joy  
As pain and virtue give. To cheer thy state  
I bid ascend those subtle and fair spirits,

Whose homes are the dim caves of human  
thought,  
And who inhabit, as birds wing the wind,  
Its world-surrounding ether: they behold  
Beyond that twilight realm, as in a glass,  
The future: may they speak to comfort thee!

**Chorus of Spirits**

**Sopranos and Altos**

8 From unremember'd ages we  
Gentle guides and guardians be  
Of heav'n-oppress'd mortality;  
And we breathe, and sicken not,  
The atmosphere of human thought:  
Be it dim, and dank, and gray,  
Like a storm-extinguish'd day,  
Travell'd o'er with dying gleams;  
Be it bright as all between  
Cloudless skies and windless streams,  
Silent, liquid, and serene;  
As the birds within the wind,  
As the fish within the wave,  
As the thoughts of man's own mind  
Float through all above the grave;

We make there our liquid lair,  
Voyaging cloudlike and unpent  
Through the boundless element:  
From thence we bear the prophecy  
Which begins and ends with thee!

**Prometheus (Baritone)**

9 How fair these airborne shapes! and yet I feel  
Most vain all hope but love; and thou art far,

Asia! who, when my being overflow'd,  
Wert like a golden chalice to bright wine  
Which else had sunk into the thirsty dust.

All things are still: alas! how heavily  
This quiet morning weighs upon my heart;  
Though I should dream I could ev'n sleep with  
grief  
If slumber were denied not. I would fain  
Be what it is my destiny to be,  
The saviour and the strength of suffer'ing man,  
Or sink into the original gulf of things:  
There is no agony, no solace left;  
Earth can console, Heav'n can torment no more.

**Voices of Spirits (Soli)**

10 Life of Life! thy lips enkindle  
With their love the breath between them;  
And thy smiles before they dwindle  
Make the cold air fire; then screen them  
In those looks, where whoso gazes  
Faints, entangled in their mazes.

Child of Light! thy limbs are burning  
Through the vest that seems to hide them;  
As the radiant lines of morning  
Through the clouds, ere they divide them;  
And this atmosphere divinest  
Shrouds thee wheresoe'er thou shinest.

**Contralto**

11 Fair are others; none beholds thee,  
But thy voice sounds low and tender  
Like the fairest, for it folds thee

From thy sight, that liquid splendour,  
And all feel, yet see thee never,  
As I feel now, lost for ever!

**Semichorus with the Soli**

Lamp / Life of Earth! Where'er thou movest  
Its dim shapes are clad with brightness,  
And the souls of whom thou lovest  
Walk upon the winds with lightness,  
Till they fail, as I am failing,  
Dizzy, lost, yet unbewailing!

End of Part I

**Part II**

**Scene 1**

Heaven. Jupiter on his Throne. Thetis and the  
other Deities assembled.

**No. 3**

**Jupiter (Tenor)**

<sup>12</sup> Ye congregated pow'rs of heav'n, who share  
The glory and the strength of him ye serve,  
Rejoice! henceforth I am omnipotent.  
All else had been subdued to me; alone  
The soul of man, like unextinguish'd fire,  
Yet burns towards heav'n with fierce reproach,  
and doubt,  
Hurling up insurrection, which might make  
Our antique empire insecure, though built  
On eldest faith, and hell's coeval, fear;  
And though my curses through the pendulous  
air,

Like snow on herbless peaks, fall flake by flake,  
And cling to it; though under my wrath's night  
It climbs the crags of life, step after step,  
It yet remains supreme o'er misery,  
Aspiring, unrepress'd, yet soon to fall:  
Ev'n now I have begotten a strange wonder,  
That fatal child, the terror of the earth,  
Who waits but till the destined hour arrive,  
To redescend and trample out the spark.

Pour forth heav'n's wine, Idæan Ganymede,  
And let it fill the Dædal cups like fire,  
And from the flow'r-inwoven soil divine,  
Ye all-triumphant harmonies arise,  
Drink! be the nectar circling through your veins  
The soul of joy, ye ever-living Gods,  
Till exultation burst in one wide voice  
Like music from Elysian winds.

*(The Car of the Hour arrives. Demogorgon  
descends.)*

<sup>13</sup> Awful shape, what art thou? Speak!

**Demogorgon (Male Chorus)**

Eternity. Demand no direr name.  
Descend, and follow me down the abyss.  
I am thy child, as thou wert Saturn's child;  
Mightier than thee: and we must dwell together  
Henceforth in darkness.

**Jupiter (Tenor)**

Mercy! Mercy!  
No pity, no release, no respite!



Spectres we  
Of the dead Hours be,  
We bear Time to his tomb in eternity.

**Chorus**

Strew, Oh, strew  
Hair, not yew!  
Wet the dusty pall with tears, not dew!  
Be the faded flowers  
Of Death's bare bowers  
Spread on the corpse of the King of Hours!  
Haste, Oh, haste!  
As shades are chased,  
Trembling by day from heaven's blue waste.  
We melt away,  
Like dissolving spray,  
From the children of a diviner day,  
With the lullaby  
Of the winds that die  
On the bosom of their own harmony!

**Voice of unseen Spirits (Chorus)**

**Tenors**

The pine boughs are singing  
Old songs with new gladness,  
The billows and fountains  
Fresh music are flinging!  
Like the notes of a spirit from land and from sea;  
The storms mock the mountains  
With the thunder of gladness.  
But where are ye?

**Semichorus of Hours**

**Altos**

The voice of the Spirits of Air and of Earth  
Have drawn back the figured curtain of sleep,  
Which cover'd our being and darken'd our birth  
In the deep, in the deep,  
Oh, below the deep.

**Sopranos and Basses**

We have heard the lute of Hope in sleep;  
We have known the voice of Love in dreams;  
We have felt the wand of Power, and leap  
As the billows leap in the morning beams!

**Chorus of Spirits**

Weave the dance on the floor of the breeze,  
Pierce with song heaven's silent light,  
Enchant the day that too swiftly flees,  
To check its flight ere the cave of Night.

Once the hungry Hours were hounds  
Which chased the day like a bleeding deer,  
And it limped and stumbled with many wounds  
Through the nightly dells of the desert year.

But now, Oh weave the mystic measure  
Of music, and dance, and shapes of light,  
Let the Hours and the spirits of might and  
pleasure,  
Like the clouds and sunbeams, unite.

**Chorus of Hours (Selected Basses)**

Whence come ye, so wild and so fleet,  
For sandals of lightning are on your feet,

And your wings are soft and swift as thought,  
And your eyes are as love that is veiled not?

**Spirits (Soli)**

[17] We come from the mind  
Of human kind  
Which was late so dusk, and obscene, and blind,  
Now 'tis an ocean  
Of clear emotion,  
A heav'n of serene and mighty motion.

Years after years,  
Through blood and tears,  
And a thick hell of hatreds, and hopes, and fears,  
We waded and flew,  
And the islets were few  
Where the bud-blighted flowers of happiness grew.

Our feet now, ev'ry palm,  
Are sandall'd with calm,  
And the dew of our wings is a rain of balm,  
And, beyond our eyes,  
The human love lies  
Which makes all it gazes on Paradise.

**Chorus of Spirits and Hours**

[18] Then weave the web of the mystic measure;  
From the depths of the sky and the ends of the earth,  
Come, swift Spirits of might and of pleasure,  
Fill the dance and the music of mirth,  
As the waves of a thousand streams rush by  
To an ocean of splendour and harmony!

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792 – 1822)

[19] **Blest Pair of Sirens**

(At a Solemn Musick)

Blest pair of Sirens, pledges of Heaven's joy,  
Sphere-born, harmonious sisters, Voice and Verse,  
Wed your divine sounds, and mixt power employ,  
Dead things with inbreathed sense able to pierce.  
And to our high-raised phantasy present  
That undisturbèd song of pure concent,  
Aye sung before the sapphire coloured throne  
To Him that sits thereon,  
With saintly shout and solemn jubilee;  
Where the bright Seraphim, in burning row,  
Their loud uplifted angel-trumpets blow,  
And the Cherubic host, in thousand quires,  
Touch their immortal harps of golden wires,  
With those just spirits that wear victorious palms,  
Hymns devout and holy psalms  
Singing everlastingly:  
That we on earth with undiscording voice  
May rightly answer that melodious noise;  
As once we did, till disproportioned sin  
Jarr'd against nature's chime, and with harsh din  
Broke the fair music that all creatures made  
To their great Lord, whose love their motion swayed  
In perfect diapason, whilst they stood  
In first obedience, and their state of good.  
O may we soon again renew that song  
And keep in tune with Heaven, till God ere long  
To His celestial concert us unite,  
To live with Him, and sing in endless morn of light.

John Milton (1608 – 1674)

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## SIR CHARLES HUBERT HASTINGS PARRY

(1848–1918)

*première recording*

### SCENES FROM SHELLEY'S

#### 'PROMETHEUS UNBOUND' (1880)\*

61:02

#### 1–11 PART I. INTRODUCTION

[34:35]

#### 12–18 PART II

[26:27]

#### 19 BLEST PAIR OF SIRENS (1887)

9:41

(At a Solemn Musick)

TT 70:48

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