



Promenade

Choirs

Messa di Gloria

by Puccini

Directed by
Christopher Goldsack

Jeff Stewart - tenor

Mica Smith - baritone

Richard Gowers - organ

with the generous support of the
Christine Best Foundation

St James's Church, Weybridge
5pm October 16th 2022

www.promenade.org.uk



Puccini is justly celebrated as one of the greatest opera composers, renowned particularly for *La Boheme*, *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly*. He was the fourth generation of a family of church musicians from Lucca in northern Italy, and held the position of town organist and *maestro di capella* at the cathedral of San Paolino. He studied at the nearby Institute Musicale, and, whilst he was still only eighteen, he composed this setting of the mass for choir and orchestra as his graduation piece. By now, however, Puccini had already chosen the future direction of his career, which was to be in dramatic opera rather than liturgical music. He had been sufficiently eager, during the spring of 1876, to walk the twenty miles from Lucca to Pisa and back for a performance of Verdi's *Aida*, and it was this experience which seemed finally to have decided him on becoming a composer of musical theatre. The first performance of the *Messa a quattro voci*, in 1880, was a great success, praised by critics and public alike, but Puccini filed it away and it was not heard again in his lifetime.

In 1951 Father Dante del Fiorentino, an émigré Italian priest living in New York who had known Puccini when he was a young curate, was visiting Lucca to collect material for a biography of the composer. He came upon a copy of the mass and, on his return home, organised its American premiere in Chicago in 1952, seventy-two years after its premiere in Lucca. Regrettably, the notes in the preface of the published score perpetuated the fiction claimed by Father Dante that he had 'rediscovered' the 'lost' manuscript amongst the large collection of Puccini's works. In fact, the work had never been lost; Puccini scholars always knew of its existence and Father Dante was by no means the first to have seen the manuscript. The real reason why it was not performed after its premiere was because Puccini quite clearly intended it to be a farewell to his association with sacred music.

Since its publication in 1951 it has been universally known as the *Messa di Gloria*, and it has become a firmly established part of the choral repertoire. It is a delightfully youthful, tuneful and sunny work, in which the composer's operatic credentials are immediately clear.

Kyrie
Gloria
Sanctus and Benedictus
Agnus Dei