

A still life painting in a classical style. In the foreground, a wide-brimmed hat with a dark band and a light-colored crown sits on a surface. Behind it, a bag with a colorful, patterned strap (red, orange, and blue) is visible. The background is a textured, light-colored wall. The overall mood is quiet and contemplative.

A Handful of Singers

Tomos Watkins conductor

The Road Home

Rheinberger Abendlied

Thompson Frostiana

Mendelssohn Brahms Carter Paulus Barber

Saturday 1 December 7.30pm

St Mary the Virgin Bathwick BA2 4EB

Tickets £15 (£5 for under 25s)

Bath Box Office 01225 463362 www.bathboxoffice.org.uk

www.ahandfulofsingers.org

On the eve of Advent, **A Handful of Singers'** winter concert goes by the title of "**The Road Home**". With this, his inaugural programme, Tomos Watkins demonstrates a deft interweaving of the sacred and profane bound together with themes of searching and belonging, light and darkness. In the first half, we hear the quest for spiritual fulfilment in Mendelssohn's beautiful, pleading *Psalm 43* and similarly in Brahms' powerful motet *Warum ist das Licht gegeben dem Mühseligen?* (Lord, why is the light vouchsafed?). Rheinberger's delicate, heartfelt *Abendlied* (Evening Song) beseeches God as the day ends and "evening shadows darken". The pilgrimage wends its way through the wistful secular song of Elliot Carter's setting of Emily Dickinson's poem *Heart not so Heavy As Mine* and in Stephen Paulus' song *The Road Home* where he ingeniously recreates the sound of the Spiritual by adapting "Prospect" from Southern Harmony. The sound world of Samuel Barber's well-known *Sure on this Shining Night* glistens and gleams before the first half concludes with the briefest of song thoughts *Heaven-Haven* and the touching *The Monk and his Cat*, also by Samuel Barber.

The second half of the programme steps into a lighter mood with Brahms' extraordinary *Liebeslieder Walzes Op 52*. Said to reflect his frustrated love of Clara Schumann, these love songs were "of the time" and intentionally light-hearted. The programme concludes with *Frostiana*, seven country songs by Robert Frost set to music by Randall Thompson. Opening with *The Road Not Taken*, Thompson's profound, chorale-like setting sets a serious final scene for our journey before leading us to *The Pasture*, appropriately pastoral in sound with a simple, lilting melody. In this, and the next four songs, Thompson varies the textures by mixing the voices at his disposal, sometimes using only male voices, sometimes women's. Light-hearted dialogue in *The Telephone* and *A Girl's Garden* gives way to silent darkness in *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* and finally, the constant light of the galaxy in *Choose Something Like a Star*.

One of Bath's most respected choral ensembles, **A Handful of Singers** has an enviable reputation as a high quality, versatile choir of 20-25 auditioned singers. Founded in 2002 by a small group of experienced singers, the choir grew in size and stature under the direction of the award-winning conductor, Christopher Finch and is now delighted to introduce its new music director Tomos Watkins. Performances range from a cappella concerts to larger works with orchestral accompaniment, and repertoire from the 16th to the 21st Century. It collaborates with the region's best instrumentalists and singers and has performed in the presence of the Duchess of Cornwall. The choir has undertaken concert tours in Ireland and Italy, and has released a CD, *Sing... Be... Live... See...* (4-Part Music 4PM/12174), featuring music by an exciting range of 21st Century American and European composers.

"A masterclass in purity of tone and musical understanding".

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 **a handful of singers**