Anna Gould – Soprano

Described by the Derby Evening Telegraph as a fresh, engaging soprano, Anna is based in Northamptonshire and has sung up and down the UK as a choral singer and soprano soloist. She is a permanent member of the choirs of St Michael's Church in Cornhill and St Alban's Holborn, and sings as a choral deputy across London. Anna took over the position of solo cantor at the Deutsche Evangelische Christuskirche in Knightsbridge during the pandemic, providing vocal leadership for the services over Zoom. She also sings with ensembles in London and the newly formed professional chamber choir Luminatus in the Midlands. Recent solo concerts have included Allegri's Miserere in Kettering and the Brahms Requiem for the Northampton Philharmonic Choir, Mendelssohn's Elijah with the Wellingborough Singers and a concert of Bach and Vivaldi with the Leicester Philharmonic. Other Oratorio engagements include Bach's St John Passion and Handel's Messiah in Derby Cathedral; the St Cecilia Chorus in Epsom, Surrey; the Central United-Reformed Church, Sheffield, and for St Michael's Cornhill, London, Handel's Messiah with Luminatus on period instruments and Mozart Exultate Jubilate with the Portsmouth Baroque choir.

Gareth Edmunds - *Tenor*

Gareth studied at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama where he was awarded the Eileen Price prize for lieder singing.
Roles include Ferrando *Così fan tutte,* Paris *La belle Hélène,* Acis/Damon *Acis and Galatea*, Nemorino *L'elisir* d'amore, Captain Macheath *The Beggar's Opera*, Dr Eisenstein *Die Fledermaus*, Aeneas/Sailor *Dido and Aeneas*, Pluto *Orpheus in the Underworld,* Frederic *Pirates of Penzance,* Lord Tolloler *Iolanthe,* Nanki-Poo *The Mikado,* Lysander *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Prince Charming *Cendrillon*. Gareth has also performed contemporary works in opera galas including Ferdinand *The Tempest (Ades)* and Sylvester *The Silver Tassie (Turnage)*. Gareth has performed extensively worldwide including live broadcasts of Bach's *Magnificat* on Estonian National Radio in Tallinn, a programme of Bach, Sørensen and Pärt at Holmens Kirke, Copenhagen broadcast on DR P2 Klassisk, operas in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and at many major European concert halls, including the Gewandhaus, Leipzig and the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam.

21.Recit. (Sop & Ten)	And Ananias went his way…
22.Chorus	O great is the depth…

INTERVAL

Part 2

24.Recit. (Sop)	And Paul came to the congregation
25.Duet (Ten & Bass)	Now we are ambassadors in the Name of Christ
26.Chorus	How lovely are the messengers..
28.Recit. (Ten)	But when the Jews saw the multitudes
Chorus (the multitude)	"Thus saith the Lord:"
29.Recit. (Ten)	And they laid wait for Paul
Chorus (the multitude)	"Is this he, who in Jerusalem destroyed…"
Choral	O Thou, the true and only Light
30.Recit. (Ten & Paul)	But Paul and Barnabus spake freely
32.Recit. (Sop)	And there was a man at Lystra
36.Aria (Paul)	"For know ye not that ye are his temple"
& Chorus (of Christians)	"But our God abideth in heaven"
37.Recit. (Sop)	Then the multitude was stirred up…
38.Chorus (Jews & Gentiles)	"This is Jehovah's temple"
39.Recit. (Sop)	And they all persecuted Paul
40.Aria -Cavatina (Ten)	"Be thou faithful unto death"
41.Recit. (Sop)	And Paul sent and called the elders..
Recit. (Paul)	"Ye know at all seasons I have been with you"
Recit.(Sop)	And they all wept sore and prayed
42.Solos & Chorus	"Far be it from thy path"
Recit. (Paul)	"What mean ye thus to weep?"
43.Chorus	See what love hath the father
44.Recit. (Sop)	And though he be offered upon the sacrifice…
45.Chorus - Finale	Not only unto Him…Bless thou the Lord

St Paul – The Argument

Part 1. The persecuted Christian Church in Jerusalem prays to the Lord for power to resist the fury of the Heathen. Stephen is accused of blasphemy by the incensed people, and is brought before the Council. He reproves his judges for the obstinacy with which they and their father have rejected the true faith. They refuse to hear him, and insist upon putting him to death by stoning. Stephen suffers martyrdom, praying for mercy on his persecutors. Devout men carry him lamenting to his burial, uttering words of peace and hope over his grave. Saul, who is present at the martyrdom, resolves to continue his persecution of the Christian Church, and journeys towards Damascus. A sudden light shines around him, and he is struck with blindness. A voice from heaven calls upon him to proclaim the glory of the Lord, and he is led to Damascus. He prays, fully repentant, and the Lord sends Ananias, who restores his sight, conferring upon him the commission as a Christian preacher. He is baptized and preaches in the synagogue, the congregation praising the wisdom and knowledge of God.

Part 2. Saul, who after his conversion takes the name of Paul, preaches to the congregation. He and Barnabus are chosen by the Holy Spirit to become ambassadors to spread the word, the multitude acknowledging them as messengers who preach the gospel of peace. The Jews, not believing in the Saviour, are envious, and consult how to kill Paul. Paul and Barnabus turn away to preach to the Gentiles. Paul miraculously cures a cripple at Lystra, and endeavours to divert the minds of the people from the worship of false idols to the one true living God. This excites the anger of the multitude, Jews and Gentiles accusing him of having spoken against Jehova's temple and the holy law, raising a cry of "Stone him to death". But the Lord saves him from persecution, Paul telling the elders at Ephesus that he is bound in the spirit to go to Jerusalem, and they will see his face no more. They weep and pray, but Paul says he is ready to die for the Lord, and they accompany him to his ship where he departs. It is now their comfort to be God's own children. To him who fought a good fight and kept the faith, a crown of righteousness is given, but also given to all those who believe. They bless the Lord, and praise his holy name for ever.

Programme note: Felix Mendelssohn (1809-47) was born into a wealthy and cultured Berlin family. He was a precociously gifted child, musicians of the day hailing him as a second Mozart; by the time he had reached his mid-teens Mendelssohn had composed a large number of mature works, including twelve string symphonies and his first symphony for full orchestra, written when he was only fifteen, the *String Octet*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* following a year later. Mendelssohn's extraordinary gifts were not confined to composition; he became a brilliant pianist and organist, a fine string player and an inspirational conductor. As an organiser, educator and administrator, Mendelssohn also raised performance standards to new heights and created many opportunities for contemporary composers and performers. In 1829, still only twenty, he conducted the first public performance of the *St. Matthew Passion* since Bach's death, an event which, probably more than any other, provided the impetus for the 19th century rediscovery of Bach. Mendelssohn visited England many times, where he was received with adulation, becoming a great favourite of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.

In 1831 Mendelssohn was commissioned to compose an oratorio. He decided on Paul, probably because of the tremendous dramatic possibilities it offered. He began work in March 1834. Given Mendelssohn's high regard for the choral masterpieces of Bach and Handel, it is no surprise to find that *St Paul* is modelled on similar lines, with an integrated scheme of recitatives, arias and choruses. His use of chorales to reflect on the action at important moments is clearly influenced by Bach's Passions. One of Bach's favourite chorales, 'Wachet auf' (Sleepers, wake), is heard at the very beginning of the overture and later on in the chorus. Handel's influence is also evident in the dramatic use of the chorus, often central to the action, at other times providing appropriate commentary on the unfolding events. Of course, the work is full of Mendelssohn's own innovations, the most striking of which is his use of a four-part chorus of women's voices – used only once in the piece – to represent the voice from heaven, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?'.

The text of the oratorio is based very largely on the Acts of the Apostles. Part I opens with the martyrdom of Stephen and Saul's persecution of the Christians. This is followed by the conversion of Paul, his baptism and ordination as a minister by Ananias. Part II finds Paul and Barnabas becoming the ambassadors of the Church. Their duet is followed by one of the oratorio's best-loved choruses, 'How lovely are the messengers'. We then hear of the Jews' attempted entrapment of Paul and the miraculous healing at Lystra of a crippled man. The work ends with Paul leaving his church at Ephesus and sailing for Jerusalem, and new challenges. The work as a whole demonstrates Mendelssohn's supreme gift as both a dramatic and lyrical writer for voices, and, though second to Elijah in popularity, deserves its place as one of the standard works of the repertoire.

Village Voices

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Christmas Carols and Songs

with **Festive Readings**

St Peter's Church, Walgrave

Thursday 18th December, 7.15 pm

A glass of mulled wine on arrival!

Do come and join us

Tickets £10 and £5 for children under 12

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Next term, Village Voices will be preparing for a concert in Brixworth Church on Friday, 27th March, where we shall be singing Cecilia McDowell's setting of the Magnificat along with a perennial favourite for choirs and audiences alike, the serene Requiem by Gabriel Faure. New singers are always welcome, so do come along and join us, on Thursday evenings in Old Village Hall, beginning next term on January 8th.

The Church of Holy Trinity, Rothwell

Friday, 28th November, 2025

Village Voices

present

Saint Paul

an Oratorio by

Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy

with soloists

Anna Gould – Soprano

Gareth Edmunds – Tenor

Stephen Alder – Bass

and

Richard Dunster-Sigtermans – Organ

Conductor – Ian Clarke

Programme

Saint Paul

Part 1

1.Overture – Organ	
2.Chorus (of Christians) -	Lord, Thou alone art God
3.Choral	To God on high be thanks and praise
4.Recitative (Sop)	And the many that believed
The false witnesses	"We verily have heard him blaspheme"
5.Chorus (of the people)	"Now this man ceaseth not…"
6.Recit. (Sop)	And all that sat in the council
Stephen (Ten)	"Men, brethren, and father, hearken to me..."
Chorus (of Hebrews)	"Take him away!"
Stephen	"Lo, I see the heavens opened…"
7.Aria (Sop)	Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets
8.Recit. (Ten)	Then they ran upon him with one accord
Chorus (Hebrews)	"Stone him to death!"
9.Recit. (Ten)	And they stoned him…
Choral	To Thee, O Lord, I yield my spirit
10.Recit. (Sop)	And the witnesses…
11.Chorus	Happy and blest are they who have endured
12.Recit. (Ten)	And Saul made havoc of the Church
Aria – Saul (Bass)	"Consume them all, Lord Sabaoth…"
14.Recit. (Ten & Bass)	And as he journeyed he came near Damascus
Chorus (the Lord)	"Saul, why persecutest thou Me?"
16.Choral	Sleepers, wake, a voice is calling
17.Recit. (Ten)	And his companions…
18. Aria – Saul (Bass)	"O God, have mercy…"
19.Recit. (Ten & Sop)	And there was a disciple at Damascus…
20.Aria (Paul) & Chorus	"I praise Thee, O Lord my God"
(Chorus)	The Lord, he is good, He will dry your tears…

Gareth sings in various choral ensembles including The Kings Consort, Mogens Dahl Kammerkor, Armonico Consort, Polyphony, Sonoro, Jervaulx Singers, The English Concert, Dunedin Consort and the Farm Street Singers. More recently Gareth has toured a lost Francesco Scarlatti Mass around the UK, featured in series for both Disney and ITV, and features in Jervaulx Singers's recently released debut album 'Les chansons des roses' which has received acclaimed reviews.

Stephen Alder – *Bass*

Stephen Alder has extensive experience in oratorio and recital, and has sung in most European countries, as well as China, Japan, USA, Israel, Brazil and Argentina. He has sung frequently with the BBC Singers, and also with most period instrument groups in the UK. He sings regularly at the Royal Opera House as a chorus member.

He has recorded J. S. Bach's Coffee and Peasant cantata with his own group 'The Friends of Apollo', made other recordings with Winchester Cathedral Choir, and has appeared many times on television, Radio 3 and Classic FM. Engagements have included concerts in Rome and Singapore; the Bach Passions, at home and abroad; the Narrator in Honegger's King David in Kings' Cambridge under Stephen Cleobury, with whom he also sang the Brahms Requiem in Ely Cathedral. As a chorister in Westminster Cathedral Choir, he was a frequent soloist, and made many recordings, concerts and broadcasts.

Richard Dunster-Sigtermans - Organ

Richard valiantly attempts to be an engineer, building large and complex models out of Meccano – these models, in fact, rarely work, which suggests that the decision to pursue music rather than engineering has made the world a safer place. A graduate of the Royal College of Music and the Universities of London and Birmingham, Richard holds a PhD in the performance practice of 20th Century British organ music. He was until 2012 Director of Music at Rugby School, and works now as an organist, accompanist, educator and examiner, is ABRSM's Chief Theory Moderator, his musical interest ranging from plainsong to prog rock.