

Pegasus

Soprano

Christina Birkett
Judith Kerr
Anna Kirby
Katy McAdam
Danielle Toyer
Madeline Smith
Serena Wilson

Alto

Ali Fryer
David Gabbe
Kirstin Gillon
Alison Grant
Philippa Ouvry
Rhian Phillips
Ali Sheppard
Natasha Woodward

Tenor

Patrick Callaghan
Andrew Craig
Alistair Fryer-Bovill
Paul French
Samir Savant
Toby Scholz

Baritone

Richard Ford
Peter Hatch
Andrew Hope
John Jones
Graham Kirk

Bass

David Benedict
David Bonar
Dave Brittain
Adrian Collister
Tim Peters
Tim Reader
Adrian Smallwood



COMING UP FROM PEGASUS...

HANDEL: MESSIAH

Saturday, 23 March, 6:30pm

Grosvenor Chapel, South Audley Street, Mayfair

A performance in collaboration with Handel House Museum to mark the 270th anniversary of the London premiere of Handel's choral masterpiece.

Tickets £10 (£5 students) from Handel House booking line: 020 7399 1953

To be sure to get news of our future performances – including Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* in June, performances with Carlos Acosta at the London Coliseum in July/August, and Baroque classics at St Martin in the Fields in September – join our mailing list at

www.pegasusmusic.org.uk

Visit Pegasus on Facebook

Follow us on Twitter @pegasuschoir

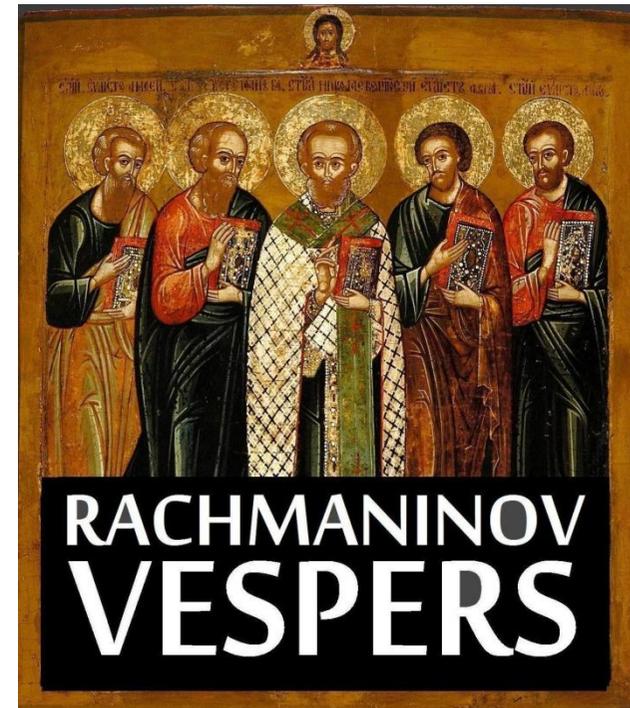
Special thanks to:

St. George's Church, Bloomsbury

Fr David Peebles, Rector

Mark Summerbell, Concerts Programmer

Michael Ewart



 **PEGASUS**

Matthew Altham, Director

Sunday, 20 January 2013, 4 pm

Sergei Rachmaninov - Vespers

The all-night vigil is celebrated on the eve of the main feasts of the Orthodox Church. Originally it lasted from 6pm on Saturday through to 9am on Sunday morning, and it consists of three separate services: Great Vespers, Matins (at midnight) and the First Hour or Prime (in the morning). By the end of the 19th century this had been reduced to a service lasting a mere three hours.

The purpose of the vigil is to show a sense of beauty in the setting sun and give the congregation a chance to consider the spiritual light of Christ, the new light of the coming day and the eternal light of the heavenly kingdom. Great Vespers begins in silence, with a cruciform censing of the altar – one of the most profound moments of Orthodox liturgy, representing eternal rest and the silence before Creation. There follows a sequence of hymns, readings, chants and prayers, providing an analogy to the way in which paradise was returned to humankind by the redeeming sacrifice of Christ. Music of course plays a part in this liturgy, as a vehicle for the sacred texts – the words are always paramount and the austerity of the music reflects this.

Rachmaninov's setting of the all-night vigil (*Vsenoshchnoye bdeniye* op. 37; the work's title is also translated as *Vespers*) was written in January and February 1915, in the middle of the First World War, when the composer was 41. During this period he was travelling throughout Russia with Serge Koussevitsky, giving concerts in aid of the war against Germany. Rachmaninov had already completed one choral work in this vein (the *Liturgy of St John Chrysostom* of 1910) but the *Vespers* is more elaborately worked out and more intense in its expression. The composer used authentic *znamenny* chant (part of the Russian Orthodox musical tradition) in seven of the movements; two movements employ Greek chants; and in the remaining movements he constructed what he described as a "conscious counterfeit of the original". The piece is dedicated to the scholar Stephan Vasilevitch Smolensky (1849–1909) who had introduced the composer to the repertoire of the church when he was at the Moscow conservatoire. Yet Rachmaninov's inspiration was as much politically motivated as anything else – the composition was a powerful affirmation of nationalism during the war.

The first performance on 10 March 1915 was given not liturgically but in a fund-raising concert by the Moscow Synodal Choir, directed by Nicolai Danilin. It was extremely well received and had to be repeated four times during the concert season.

"Even in my dreams I could not have imagined that I would write such a work," Rachmaninov told the singers at the first performance. Hearing this extraordinary piece of music, not a frozen edifice of austere musical architecture but a vibrant and powerfully emotional manifestation of religious experience, it is surely possible to understand precisely how he felt.

Pegasus

Pegasus has established a reputation as one of London's most versatile chamber choirs. Its members are experienced singers who pursue their passion for choral music alongside careers in a variety of fields. Under its director Matthew Altham, the ensemble has developed an extensive repertoire of sacred and secular music ranging from the Renaissance to the present day, sung in a dozen languages, from Czech to Quechua!

Pegasus has performed in a variety of prestigious music festivals, including the Tilford Bach Festival, the London Festival of Contemporary Church Music, and the Proms at St. Jude's. The choir also has a strong tradition of presenting concerts in collaboration with charities and music societies. Pegasus has worked with the Southbank Sinfonia under the direction of John Rutter and the London Handel Players under Laurence Cummings.

Pegasus is committed to exploring contemporary music, and has premiered works by leading British composers including John Tavener and Thomas Adès. In September 2012 the choir gave the world premiere of two pieces commissioned by Pegasus from Francis Grier, *A Baby Asleep* and *Pax*.

In 2010 Pegasus made its debut at the London Coliseum performing with renowned dancer Carlos Acosta in a production that was repeated in 2011. The choir has also collaborated with h2dance and composer Sylvia Hallett in performances at The Place in London.

Pegasus was a semi-finalist in the BBC Choir of the Year competition in 2005, and a prize-winner at the 2007 Tolosa International Choral Competition in Spain. The choir was selected to participate in the 2010 Guido d'Arezzo International Choral Competition in Italy, and in May 2013 will participate in the Florilège Vocal de Tours International Choral Song Competition in France. Pegasus has featured on Classic FM and BBC Radio 3, as well as in the Channel 4 premiere of Jonathan Dove's opera about Princess Diana, *When She Died*.

Pegasus's first CD, *Twelve Days – A Celebration of Christmas*, was released in partnership with Princess Alice Hospice and is available on the internet.

Matthew Altham has been the director of Pegasus since 2001. He began conducting choirs while studying at Oxford University, and led performances of music by the major English Renaissance composers and by Poulenc.

Alongside his work as a management consultant, Matthew directs Pegasus, Vox Cordis and the London Bach Players, with whom he has performed on several occasions in Pau, France. He has toured as a conductor to Prague, Tolosa, Arezzo and Antwerp and has broadcast on BBC Radio and Classic FM. Matthew also sings regularly in the church choir of St Mary the Virgin, Bourne Street, London.