



THE COOL WEB

A ROBERT GRAVES ORATORIO

Jools Scott (composer)
Sue Curtis (research and compilation)

In support of  Cavell
nurses' trust

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release: 03.09.2014

The Cool Web : A Robert Graves Oratorio
World Premiere – Bath Abbey, Thursday 30 October at 7.30pm

Accompanied by **The Edith Cavell Story**

The Cool Web is an oratorio for orchestra, choir and soloist created to commemorate the centenary of The Great War. This new work, composed by musician Jools Scott with a libretto compiled by Sue Curtis based on the work of Robert Graves, will have its premiere at Bath Abbey on Thursday 30th October at 7.30pm. The internationally acclaimed Endymion Ensemble will be joined by Philharmonia Voices in a performance conducted by Robin O'Neill. Baritone Edward Grint will sing the role of the young Robert Graves, accompanied by a children's choir selected from Bath schools.

Robert Graves is one of the greatest English poets of the twentieth century, and author of perhaps the most famous memoir of WW1: *Goodbye to All That*. He enlisted straight from school at the age of 19 in August 1914, and fought in the Battle of the Somme in July 1916 where he received the serious injury which ended his active service. He survived the war and went on to write, among many other works, *I Claudius* and *The White Goddess* as well as a substantial catalogue of acclaimed poetry. Graves died in 1985.

The inspiration to create **The Cool Web** came from Jools and Sue's desire to pay tribute to the young men who made such extraordinary sacrifices a century ago: the kind of sacrifice which is utterly incomprehensible to those living today. Leonard Pearcey's introduction to William Graves, who subsequently gave his enthusiastic permission to use his father's poetry, and Sue's extensive knowledge of Graves' work, made the idea a reality.

The oratorio takes the form of a series of meditations on the plight of a poet faced with the task of articulating the most unexpected, intense and terrifying of human experiences. The poetry chosen for the accompanying libretto was all written around the time of the poet's service at the front and has the vivid immediacy of a very young and rather innocent man writing about the shocking experience of combat.

The Cool Web begins with an evocation of the peaceful, bucolic, pre-war English countryside - gradually darkening as the portentous clouds of war gather, and ending with the flight of the birds and a chilling anticipation of disaster. The second section begins with the romantic vision of war as an adventure with comrades in arms - and ends in the terror and hell that is the Somme. Then to the shell-shock Graves' suffered after his near-fatal injuries, and finally a return to the post-war peace of the English wood featured at the start of the work. This time, though, it is changed and the poet can sense the presence of his dead friend, David: he acknowledges the futility of war but also a sense of reconciliation to the losses.

The oratorio will be followed by a performance of **The Edith Cavell Story** by Bath-based broadcaster and writer, Leonard Pearcey, and the actor Sophie Ward. Adapted from Diana Souhami's biography of the British nurse, this is the story of the nurse who is celebrated for saving the lives of soldiers from both sides without distinction and helping some 200 Allied soldiers escape from German-occupied Belgium. For this, having been betrayed by a collaborator, she was arrested, court-martialed, found guilty of treason and shot in October 1915. Her execution by a German firing squad received worldwide condemnation and extensive press coverage at the time. Today there are memorial to Edith Cavell across the world, from Norwich Cathedral to Trafalgar Square; in Brussels, Paris, and Melbourne, Australia. Proceeds from this evening will support the Cavell Nurses' Trust.

These two diverse reflections on the ‘first modern war’ promise to provide an intensely moving experience, which will resonate with those of all ages and experiences: **The Cool Web** is a major milestone in the City of Bath’s commemoration of the First World War.

Tickets for **The Cool Web** are available now from Bath Box Office: www.bathboxoffice.org.uk, boxoffice@bathfestivals.org.uk or tel 01225 463362 priced £10 to £30.

- Ends -

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Editors’ Notes:

- Additional information at: www.robertgravesoratorio.co.uk.
- Images on request, please contact Julie Peacock details above.
- Both Bath-based, Jools Scott and Sue Curtis have worked in partnership for seven years, during which time they have written two operas and a musical for children in addition to *The Cool Web*. Jools has written the music for three short films and is just about to embark on his first feature film, whilst Sue has recently completed her first screenplay.
- The Oratorio takes its name from Graves’ 1925 eponymous poem which describes how we use language to contain the shock of reality in order to avoid the intensity of it inducing madness:
*Children are dumb to say how hot the day is, How hot the scent is of the summer rose,
How dreadful the black wastes of evening sky, How dreadful the tall soldiers drumming by*
(Excerpt from *The Cool Web*, Robert Graves, 1925)
- More information about the Cavell Nurses Trust at: www.cavellnursestrust.org.