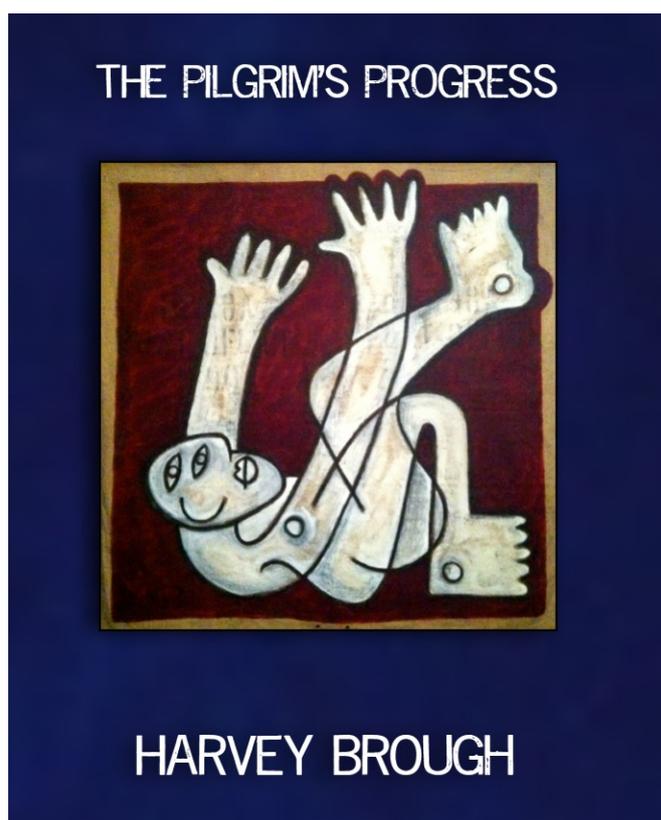


First performance of exciting new work based on Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*

On Sunday 23rd March, members of Bedford School, Bedford Girls' School and Pilgrim's Pre-Preparatory School will be joining forces with professional vocal ensemble VOCES8 and the Phoenix Orchestra to present the first performance of a specially commissioned work 'The Pilgrim's Progress' composed and directed by Harvey Brough.

The work was commissioned with generous support from the Bedford School Trust ; with a specially written libretto by James Runcie, it re-tells the classic allegorical story of Bunyan's hero 'Christian' as he makes his journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City.



Cliff Falling by Simon Rackham

musician, composer and performer in a number of diverse musical styles, varying from renaissance to jazz and blues.

Harvey takes up the story of the start of the project : « A year and a half ago, Joss Sanders contacted me to ask me about writing a piece for Bedford School, where he had recently been appointed Head of Music. His idea intrigued me - a musical version of *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan. I knew the famous book slightly, from schooldays and I knew that it had been turned into an opera by Ralph Vaughan Williams. I agreed in principle to the idea and started to read the book again to see how to proceed.

Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* has particular resonances with Bedford, as it was conceived and written by Bunyan whilst he was imprisoned in the Bedford County Gaol for preaching without a licence.

Joss Sanders, Director of Music at Bedford School, persuaded Harvey Brough to take on the project : « I was delighted when Harvey agreed to write the piece for us. I had worked with Harvey on a number of previous projects, including the first recording of his 'Requiem in Blue', and was certain that he was just the right person to take on the challenge of presenting the story in a new and accessible way. »

Harvey Brough was the front-man in the rock group 'Harvey and the Wallbangers' in the late 80s and has since then made his name as a

During my research I discovered two quite worrying things - firstly that it had taken RVW some 45 years to work out a way to turn the book into an opera, or morality as he termed it. And secondly, that the book itself is quite heavy going, being very full of religious references and extremely episodic - lots of scenes with characters who Christian encounters on his journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City - who we see fleetingly and only once in most cases.

One thing about the book which can't fail to inspire anyone who reads it is the triumph of Christian's faith over adversity and hardship so I resolved not to lose heart. And like



Harvey Brough

him, in the Slough of Despond, seek a helping hand. I know only one person who had the breadth of knowledge of literature and of the bible to take the task of writing a libretto - James Runcie - a brilliant novelist, film maker, person and (fortunately) dear friend of mine.

So James took sometime out of his incredibly busy schedule to undertake it

and I was absolutely knocked out with what he came up with. He (necessarily) chopped the book back to its essential story and then added various other elements - Psalms, the Dies Irae and various pieces of his own writing to make a really well rounded libretto, retaining all the inspirational and iconic parts of the original but giving plenty of opportunity for choruses. One other stroke of luck with this project, was the link that Bedford School has with VOCES8 - a group I had already written some arrangements and composed one piece (All the world of Solomon Grundy) for. It was suggested that they might be involved and I embraced that idea for two reasons - I had a sound in my head that I thought 8 solo voices on top of a choir might work well for. And that their participation gave us soloists to play some of the many characters in the piece.

We just had a first run through and I was thrilled with how well the choir is doing with the piece and how great it sounded even at an early stage. After an uncertain start, I am now relieved that I stuck with the project. I think we are, all together, creating something which captures something of the essence of Bunyan's book and makes it accessible to a whole new audience, who wouldn't necessarily choose to read the book. I thank particularly Joss Sanders for having the original vision and James Runcie for creating such a fantastic libretto. And all the singers, players and teachers who have put so much time, effort and love into making the first performance happen. »

The first performance of 'The Pilgrim's Progress' will take place on Sunday 23rd March 2014 at 7.30pm in the Great Hall, Bedford School. Tickets, priced £8 (£4 students) are available from the Bedford School Music Box Office Tel: 01234 362254, Email: rielden@bedfordschool.org.uk