

PRESS RELEASE

'REGARDS FROM ROCHESTER' by Thomas Hewitt Jones ROCHESTER CHORAL SOCIETY 150th ANNIVERSARY COMMISSION

Founded in 1873, Rochester Choral Society is celebrating its 150th anniversary in March 2023 with a newly-commissioned choral work, *Regards from Rochester*, by award-winning British composer, and Rochester resident, **Thomas Hewitt-Jones**. The work receives its premiere on 18 March 2023 in Rochester Cathedral.



Rochester itself is drenched in history. *Regards from Rochester* celebrates the rich history of the Medway Towns, exploring themes and valuable human stories while relating them to contemporary society. From the first Saxon settlement through to historic stronghold, from pillar of British naval history through to industrial centre and inspiration for Charles Dickens, composer Thomas Hewitt Jones hopes that this “postcard from Rochester” will celebrate and exude compassion for our planet, social conscience, humanity and kindness – values that are incredibly important to our world in 2023.

Director of Music, **John Mountford**, says: “Rochester Choral Society has passed some significant milestones recently, with 2022 marking the 100th anniversary of our first performance in Rochester Cathedral. We wanted to commission a piece which reflected the diversity of this area’s rich and turbulent history, with a historically accurate, humorous and engaging new piece. We wanted to find somebody with a connection and passion for the Medway Towns and who wanted to help raise awareness of the cultural and social heritage of the area.”

Composer **Thomas Hewitt Jones** says: “I was delighted when John Mountford approached me to commission this work for Rochester Choral Society’s very exciting 150th anniversary. Quite early on in our discussions, we decided that the richness of Medway’s history was conducive to a new text, so the result is a 10-movement oratorio which we hope tells the story of the area with sweeping melody and angularity where appropriate. I have written it to be as both engaging and as musically interesting as possible. The final movement of the work brings us to the present day, with the audience joining together to sing with one voice.”

John Mountford believes that choral societies are an essential part of national music-making after the COVID era. “Music is central to the lives of so many people; it binds community and enhances wellbeing for singers and audiences alike.

For Thomas Hewitt Jones, writing *Regards from Rochester* has been an extremely fulfilling and wholesome commission, not only given the richness of local history, but also due to the strength of the musical heritage of Rochester Choral Society dating all the way back to 1873.

“It was a privilege and a pleasure to discover many historic riches of the Medway area, which is often referred to in relation to Charles Dickens, the former Dockyard and as a stronghold to and from London, but in fact contains numerous other riches. Spending extensive time in Rochester library and reading around the history in detail, it became swiftly apparent that the area’s rich social history made up for any perception Medway may have externally of lack of charm; as the text and music were forming, I was delighted to have conversations with local Medway Council operative John Lester, who is a X generation of the Lester family in Rochester and who offered personal anecdotes of life in Medway since the Victorian era, some of which I have incorporated into the work.

Above and beyond the history books and local connections, in this work I have aimed to reflect throughout the work on the nature of life in 2022, both beyond the recent pandemic (which let’s face it indelibly changed life as we know it) and also in the shadow of contemporary issues that affect our society, not least our collective sense of identity and perhaps most importantly, the current climate change crisis.”

REGARDS FROM ROCHESTER - movements

Introduction & Rochester

The River Medway

Early History

The Cathedral

Seven Weeks (The Siege of Rochester)

Down to the Docks (Chatham Dockyard)

That House, 1857 (Charles Dickens) *Baritone soloist playing Dickens*

The Victorian High Street

Our Changing World (Contemporary themes incl. Social Conscience and Climate)

The Medway Hymn - rousing end with audience singing in unison

NOTES FOR EDITORS

Rochester Choral Society, one of Britain's oldest-established choral societies, has always striven to achieve high standards of singing, from the great choral works to traditional folk songs. Since 1922, the choir, which comprises around 75 singers, aged 18-80+, has performed regularly in Rochester Cathedral.

Rochester Choral Society appeared on BBC One's Antiques Road Trip in January 2023 in an episode featuring Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, who conducted the choir between 1902 and 1907. After the world-premiere of Thomas Hewitt Jones' *Regards from Rochester*, the choral society looks forward to a summer performance of Mendelssohn's *St Paul*, which was also performed at their very first concert in 1873.

rochesterchoral.co.uk

Thomas Hewitt Jones is an award-winning composer of contemporary classical and commercial music. Since winning the BBC Young Composer Competition in his teens, his music has been published by many of the major music publishers and is frequently heard in concert and on radio, TV and in the cinema. Thomas's diverse catalogue includes small instrumental, orchestral, choral and ballet works, and his large number of choral titles includes seasonal carols. 'What Child is This?' (OUP) has become a choral classic of recent years, garnering large numbers of performances each season. In 2021, he released 'Can you hear me?', an acclaimed response to the COVID19 pandemic. His most recent projects include 'In Our Service', a special commission from the Royal School of Church Music to celebrate the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022, and a 'Divertimento for Strings' commissioned by Lucy Melvin to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of her 'Chamber Players' courses.

He is also a composer of Library (Production) music for several commercial publishers, with a current catalogue of around a thousand tracks available for licensing which can be heard on a variety of media worldwide. He works from his own cutting-edge studio facility. He was selected to be a member of the BAFTA Crew x BFI Network for 2021-2.

thomashewittjones.com

(Illustration by Rosie Brooks)

For further press information / interviews, please contact Frances Wilson | frances_wilson66@live.com

FRANCES WILSON
Writer & Publicist
 crosseyedpianist.com