



The Alleluia: Working with George Mathew

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During the first week of October 2011 the choir was asked to workshop and perform during the annual S.T. Lee lecture at Wits University with the amazing George Mathew. Conductor and Artistic Director for *Music for Life International* and *Ubuntu Shruti*, George was asked to give a lecture titled **Social Transformation through Music: a practical approach**. His work includes **Requiem for Darfur**, **Mahler for the Children of AIDS** and **Beethoven for the Indus Valley** performed at Carnegie Hall.



We learned the Alleluia by Randall Thompson, an American composer who wrote the piece for the Berkshire Music School at Tanglewood in Massachusetts. The Tanglewood festival held annually is still home to the song as all of the instrumentalists participating in the festival would sing it every year after only a few hours of rehearsal we were told. Being closely related to current events in 1940 when it was composed there is a strong connection to the Second World War and the music is energetic yet haunting. We worked very specifically during rehearsals to relay this feeling and the musical direction and inspiration that we received from George Mathew was specifically aimed at transporting us into this different time when war was looming over every social activity, including

musical summer schools.

The performance was held during the public lecture presented in a rehearsal style in the Wits Great Hall and was relaxed and intimate, difficult to achieve in such a massive space. Part of George's methodology was that we were asked to turn away from the audience and each other, close our eyes and focus simply on producing the softest gentlest sound that we could. This brought the whole group into the same calm space needed to express the intentions of the lecture's subject material and I must say, was one of the most intense moments that I have ever experienced on stage. The reason for this is that George was trying to express the ability of music to bring together the most unlikely of companions, expressed here along racial lines and serve the purpose of creating Ubuntu, all of us being one.



This was an incredibly satisfying exercise in unity and we were extremely lucky to have worked with yet another person of musical genius who shares our views on the effect that music can have on societies. We were also hugely complemented by George Mathew when he said many times that it was a pleasure for him to have worked with us also as he believes that we already signify what Ubuntu means and how it should be embodied in the world.

Thank you to Wits University and to George Mathew for allowing us to be a part of this experience and to share music across yet another border. Thank you!