

PRESS RELEASE – 4th May 2022

Celebrating the Centenary of the English Composer Peter Tranchell

The Peter Tranchell Foundation today announces an ambitious programme of work to mark the centenary of the English composer Peter Tranchell's birth

Activities include:

- The Peter Tranchell Centenary **Composition Competition for Organ**
- **A new commission from Proms composer Cheryl Frances-Hoad**
- **A Centenary Musical Soirée and Reception** (on Saturday 19th November 2022)
- The launch of a **programme of editing and typesetting** to ensure all significant Tranchell choral, orchestral and instrumental works are available in performing editions
- **Support for performances and recordings** of Tranchell works
- **A Centenary Appeal** to raise funds for the Foundation's work in and beyond the Centenary year

Chris Henshall, the Foundation's Chair of Trustees, says: "Peter Tranchell was born in 1922 and the Foundation is delighted to be marking his centenary with an exciting programme of work to promote awareness and appreciation of his life and music. We are enormously grateful for the involvement of some of the country's leading young musicians, and for the generous financial support the Foundation is receiving. We sincerely hope that our activities will bring Tranchell's music to a wider audience."

The Peter Tranchell Centenary Composition Competition for Organ

Composers are invited to submit a composition for organ, inspired by some aspect of Peter Tranchell's life and works. Submitted works will be judged by a panel of four leading organists and composers for organ (to be revealed after the award is announced).

The winner will receive £500 and a world première performance of their composition played by Francesca Massey at the Centenary Musical Soirée at St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, on 19th November 2022.

A formidable pianist and organist himself, Tranchell wrote about twelve works for organ, all dating from his early career and charting his musical development. The best known is the 1958 Sonata, written for, and playing on the name of, Peter Le Huray, highlighting Tranchell's fascination with cryptography in music (a commercial recording is due to be released soon). Competitors are encouraged to reflect these interests in their compositions.

The deadline for entries in the competition is 12 August 2022. Full details are given here

<https://peter-tranchell.uk/peter-tranchell-centenary-composition-competition>

Francesca Massey comments "I applaud the Foundation's decision to hold the Peter Tranchell Centenary Composition Competition for Organ, and I am honoured to have been asked to perform the winning entry. There is a wealth of talent in the organ world, and it is wonderful to have this challenge to compose a new work to celebrate the centenary of a creative organist and composer. The competition is a great way to support contemporary talent whilst acknowledging Tranchell's legacy."

Choral Commission

The Foundation is delighted that Cheryl Frances-Hoad has accepted a commission to compose a short piece for Gonville and Caius College Chapel Choir inspired by words and music she has encountered in Peter Tranchell's choral works. The new composition will be given its world premiere by Caius Choir directed by Matthew Martin at the Centenary Musical Soirée at St Paul's Knightsbridge on Saturday 19th November 2022.

Cheryl, who will have another new commission performed at this year's Proms (see: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/events/eb34mb>), says: "I studied at Caius, but after Peter Tranchell retired so I was not familiar with his work. I have been impressed by the affection that those who knew him have for the man and his music, and I am enjoying the challenge of reflecting this and some of his choice of texts in my composition."

Centenary Musical Soirée and Reception

The Centenary Musical Soirée will be held at St Paul's Knightsbridge on Saturday 19th November 2022. It will include works by Tranchell for choir, organ and piano, the premiere of the winning entry in the Peter Tranchell Centenary Composition Competition for Organ, and the premiere of a short choral piece the Foundation has commissioned from Proms composer Cheryl Frances-Hoad (who studied music at Gonville and Caius College). Performers will include the Gonville and Caius College Chapel Choir and Consort conducted by Matthew Martin (Precentor and Director of Studies in Music), Francesca Massey (a previous organ scholar at Caius) and other Caians past and present.

Chris Henshall, the Foundation's Chair of Trustees says: "Tranchell's music ranges from the serious and spiritual to lighter and sometimes mischievous pieces that were clearly written with a twinkle in the composer's eye. We are working with the performers to develop a programme that reflects the range of his output and his sense of humour and enjoyment of the ridiculous as well as his formidable musical talents. We think he would have approved of the use of the term "Soirée" to reflect this approach. The evening will start with a glass of sparkling wine (or cordial), followed by around 90 minutes of music, and concluding with a Reception (ticketed separately). Further details and tickets will be available in the coming weeks via the Foundation's website."

Matthew Martin says: "I am delighted to be bringing the Caius Chapel Choir and Consort to this prestigious London venue to perform a varied programme of music by a former Precentor and Director of Studies in Music at Caius, together with the new commission from Cheryl Frances-Hoad. We already had a few Tranchell pieces in the Choir's repertoire, and I am enjoying getting to know more of his music. I hope this concert will encourage others to perform more Tranchell, and to enjoy it as much as we do"

Centenary Appeal

The Centenary Appeal was launched in February with an initial target of £28,000. Donations currently total over £19,000. Details of how to give can be found at: <https://peter-tranchell.uk/2022-the-centenary>. The Foundation is a registered charity and donations from UK tax payers are eligible for GiftAid.

Notes for Editors

Who was Peter Tranchell?

Peter Tranchell was born on 14th July 1922 and educated at the Dragon School (Oxford), Clifton College (Bristol) and King's College Cambridge where he studied Classics and then Music. He was awarded the MusB in 1949 with reputedly the highest distinction ever given for his performance of Liszt's Sonata in B minor. After teaching for a year at Eastbourne College, Tranchell returned to Cambridge in 1950 as a lecturer in the Faculty of Music and Director of Studies at Fitzwilliam, taking up a fellowship and the post Director of College Music at Gonville & Caius in 1960, where he succeeded Patrick Hadley as Precentor in 1962. He retired in 1989 and died in 1993.

Tranchell's life may seem at first glance to be typical of the privileged middle classes of his time, but the reality is more complex. Having been born in India where his father was in the Colonial Service, he was sent to England at the age of four to live with his unsympathetic maiden aunt. His brother James, born three years after Peter, in due course joined him and they became very close. When James was killed in a road accident at the age of 13 Peter was understandably devastated, and felt the loss keenly for the rest of his life. His university education and musical development were disrupted by four years of service in the army during and after the war, and despite huge efforts and some initial successes in the years that followed, his music – though often loved by those it was written for and performed by – failed to make it to the “mainstream”.

Tranchell's reputation in the world of music and more generally was probably not helped by his often outspoken views and openly gay behaviour at a time when homosexuality was illegal and disapproved of in conventional circles. But those who knew him remember his mischievous wit and intelligence, and the generosity he showed in providing music and advice to any who asked for it.

In the 1950s and 60s, Tranchell wrote a wide range of orchestral, instrumental and choral music, including the opera *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1951), the West End musical *Zuleika* (1954-7), and the ballet *Images of Love* (1964), commissioned for Covent Garden and choreographed by Kenneth MacMillan with dancers including Rudolf Nureyev. Although Tranchell's music at this time was admired by members of the musical establishment, almost none was advanced for publication. Following a number of disappointments (including the decision by a Hollywood director not to pursue a film of *Zuleika*), Tranchell focussed his creative energies increasingly on University and college activities in Cambridge, composing a wide range of music for Caius Chapel Choir, various “entertainments” for Caius and other colleges and numerous songs and lighter pieces for *The Cambridge Footlights* and private functions. Little of this music has been performed or heard outside Cambridge, but many of those who know it believe that it deserves a wider audience.

Tranchell took a keen interest throughout his life in contemporary music, experimenting with various techniques, but developing a very personal style that combines infectious melodies with complex chromatic harmony. Much of his output is demanding for the performers (he was a formidable pianist himself and was often writing for talented singers and instrumentalists) but he could write simpler pieces as well (eg for congregational singing in church services). His music is difficult to characterise; descriptions include “fun”, “entertaining”, “complex”, “beautifully crafted” “idiosyncratic”, “eccentric”, “bonkers”. But it is never dull, and almost all his work has an immediate appeal to listeners.

Tranchell's compositions are listed in the Classified Handlist, available here: <https://peter-tranchell.uk/classified-handlist-of-the-music-of-peter-tranchell>

A more detailed biography is available here: <https://peter-tranchell.uk/blog/a-biography-of-peter-tranchell-by-john-gwinnell>

What is The Peter Tranchell Foundation?

After his death in 1993, the Executors of Tranchell's Will worked informally with other friends and colleagues and with Cambridge University Library to ensure that his music and writings were archived, catalogued and made available to scholars, and that his musical legacy was not forgotten.

This work is now being taken forward by The Peter Tranchell Foundation which was registered with the Charity Commission as a Community Interest Organisation in 2021. Its objects are to promote awareness and appreciation of the life and music of Peter Tranchell. More details are available at: <https://peter-tranchell.uk/the-peter-tranchell-foundation>

[Francesca Massey](#)

Francesca Massey has recently embarked upon an active career as a freelance organist, choral conductor and teacher, having worked as a cathedral musician for 20 years. Born in Birmingham in 1982, Francesca was educated at Cambridge University and the Royal Northern College of Music (on a prestigious ABRSM Scholarship), holding Organ Scholarships at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge and Manchester Cathedral. She later became Assistant Organist at Great St Mary's Church, Cambridge, Assistant Director of Music at Peterborough Cathedral, Sub-Organist at Durham Cathedral and Director of Music at Rochester Cathedral. Francesca performs regularly as a recitalist. She has three solo recordings to her name (Bravura!, The Forgotten Gem, and The complete works of Maurice Duruflé) which all received excellent reviews and were Editor's Choice in Organists' Review. See: <https://www.francesca-massey.org>

[Cheryl Frances-Hoad](#)

Admired for her originality, fluency and professionalism, Cheryl Frances-Hoad has been composing to commission since she was fifteen. Classical tradition (she trained as a cellist and pianist at the Menuhin School before going on to Gonville and Caius College Cambridge and King's College London) along with diverse contemporary inspirations including literature, painting and dance, have contributed to a creative presence provocatively her own. Her output - widely premiered, broadcast and commercially recorded, reaching audiences from the Proms to outreach workshops - addresses all genres from opera, ballet and concerto to song, chamber and solo music. See: <https://www.cherylfranceshoad.co.uk>

[Matthew Martin](#)

Matthew Martin is Precentor and Director of Studies in Music at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. His work as a composer is published by Faber Music and Novello and written in a variety of styles, with a focus on choral and vocal repertoire. He was awarded First prize in British Composer Awards/Liturgical category (2013). Working previously on the music staff at Westminster Cathedral and the Brompton Oratory, he developed a particular interest in the study and performance of Gregorian chant: its development, notation, accompaniment and liturgical use. He is active as an organ recitalist with a focus on improvisation and French Classical music (1630-1790). His teaching is based mainly around Tonal Skills, Composition and Choral Conducting, and he coaches organists in the art of improvisation.

Commercial recordings of Peter Tranchell's music

Festive Overture (composed 1966)

BBC Concert Orchestra conducted by John Wilson, on "John Ireland - ORCHESTRAL SONGS AND MINIATURES", Dutton CDLX7246

<https://www.duttonvocalion.co.uk/proddetail.php?prod=CDLX7246>

If ye would hear the angels sing (composed 1965)

A Requiem for Stephen: Into a Greater Light, Stephen Cleobury & Choir of King's College, Cambridge, and Matthew Sandy. Spotify:

<https://open.spotify.com/track/3y1dLffyTSuzjzLIYSohEn?si=40575fc399424317>

Dormi Jesu: A Caius Christmas, Delphian DCD34152-CD, Choir of Gonville & Caius College, Geoffrey Webber. <https://www.delphianrecords.com/products/dcd34152>

A Festival of Nine Lessons & Carols, King's College Choir, Stephen Cleobury, 2008, Warner Classics 6860822. <https://www.prestomusic.com/classical/products/7982589--a-festival-of-nine-lessons-and-carols>

Oxford Christmas Choral Highlights 2010, Oxford University Press Music, 2018, available here <https://www.amazon.com/Oxford-Christmas-Choral-Highlights-2010/dp/B07L6M8FZP> and playable here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhvSLTQhiYA>

People, look East (composed 1982)

Christmas with St John's, St John's College Choir Cambridge, Andrew Nethsingha. Signum SIGCD458.

<https://signumrecords.com/product/christmas-with-st-johns/SIGCD458/>

All the World Tonight Rejoices: contemporary Christmas music by Truro Cathedral Choir, on Regent Records (REGCD560). Andrew Wyatt, organ; directed by Christopher Gray.

<https://www.regent-records.co.uk/product/all-the-world-tonight-rejoices/>

Psalms 102 and 103 (Anglican chants, 1970s?)

on *Psalms from St Paul's, Vol. 8 93-104*, Hyperion http://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/dc.asp?dc=D_CDP11008

Psalm 141 (Lord, I call upon Thee) (composed 1968) and **Psalm 133 (The Peace of God)** (composed 1962)

on *O Sacrum Convivium - Music for the Mass* sung by the choirs of St George's Metropolitan Cathedral Southwark, directed by Norman Harper (Caius 1970) and accompanied by Frederick Stocken. Priory PRCD 1189. [Psalm 141 is available on YouTube](#) (courtesy of NAXOS of America).

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