

**Michael J. Smith opus 98-102**

*Concert Version 2009*

**'The Prelude'**

an oratorio

*after William Wordsworth*

*for Lyric Soprano, Bass Baritone, Treble,  
SATB Chorus, Children's Choir & Chamber Orchestra*

**William Wordsworth**, the poet whose work inspired this oratorio, was born in Cockermouth, Cumbria, in 1770 and lived most of his life at Dove Cottage Grasmere. His sister Dorothy kept house for him all her adult life and was devoted to William's wife, Mary, and their children. The brother and sister were very much kindred spirits, and Dorothy's observations frequently provided the impetus for William's creativity. The placing of her as soloist on an equal footing with William in Smith's work reflects their mutual understanding. Wordsworth's lengthy poem *The Prelude* was not published until 1850, after the poet's death. In his lifetime he gained fame for such poems as *Tintern Abbey* and the ode *Intimations of Immortality*, lines from which also appear in this arrangement.

Nowadays Wordsworth is more often remembered for his sonnet *On Westminster Bridge* and his 'daffodils' poem, but what is often forgotten, and what is highlighted in the mood of Michael Smith's arrangement of *The Prelude* is the revolutionary and spiritual quality of the poet's outlook. He was a young man at the time of the French Revolution, writing such lines as: 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive / But to be young was very heaven'. He was inspired by many of the same egalitarian, radical and romantic principles as Shelley, Byron and Coleridge. Many of Wordsworth's poems champion the weak and the poor. They are grounded in the world around him with all its imperfections - and with the ability of the human spirit to transcend those imperfections.

*'The spirit of Nature was upon me there;  
The soul of Beauty and enduring Life  
Vouchsafed her inspiration, and diffused  
Through meagre lines and colours, and the press  
Of self-destroying transitory things,  
Composure and ennobling Harmony.'*

(The concluding lines of Book 7 of *The Prelude* by William Wordsworth, as quoted by Michael Smith in his manuscript version of the oratorio.)

(Susan Hedworth: 2009)



*'The Child is father of the Man'*

Illustration © 2012 Sue Gallagher after a photograph of MJS and his nephew, Tom Saunders - Ullswater - c 1984

**Instrumentation:**

Treble,  
Soprano,  
Bass Baritone,  
Five Children,  
SATB Chorus

Oboe  
Clarinet in B $\flat$

Violin 1  
Violin 2  
Viola  
Violoncello,  
Double Bass  
Piano

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**For details of Michael Smith, the composer,**

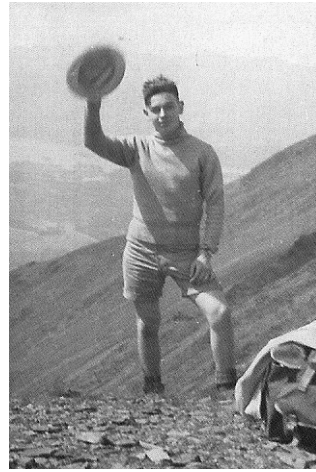
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**For details of the premiere performance of the oratorio**

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## Appendix One

### Michael Smith



Michael Smith c.1956

**Michael J. Smith** was born in North East England. As a boy he played violin, and graduated in his teens from the Newcastle Royal Grammar School orchestra to the Northumberland Amateur Orchestra and the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. He continued violin lessons with Eta Cohen in Leeds and then with Antonio Brosa at the Royal College of Music. When he moved to the Netherlands in 1963, he played with the Amsterdam Philharmonic. Returning to Britain for 8 years he joined the Scottish National Orchestra, touring with Jacqueline du Pré and Janet Baker. Back in the Netherlands in 1977, he switched to viola and became section leader of the Noordhollands Philharmonisch Orkest.

During a 40-year career he produced a steady stream of compositions including violin quartets, pieces for string orchestra, piano, violin and viola, and numerous arrangements for viola ensembles, many of which are still performed in the Netherlands. But his labour of love for the last 16 years of his life was the oratorio *The Prelude*, inspired by his passion for the Lake District and the poetry of William Wordsworth, whose long autobiographical poem inspired this oratorio.

*The Prelude* was projected to take 10 hours if performed in entirety. Smith began by setting the accompaniment for 2 pianos. He also began to score one third of it for full orchestra when the opportunity arose to perform it in the UK. For this purpose, he selected the numbers presented here, most of which were performed by Ryton Community Choir in December 2009. Smith attended the performance. Sadly, he died from an unexpected heart attack only a week later. The recording of the first piece, *Dear Native Regions*, played at his funeral service, was a truly fitting tribute to a dedicated musician and a remarkable man.

#### **In his own words (July, 2009):-**

“My selection from *The Prelude* is part of much larger work for chorus, soloists and normal symphony orchestra. For the occasion I have made a very small selection from the 180 numbers, and reduced the orchestra to the size of a chamber orchestra. As someone who spent his first 5 years on the borders of Lakeland, and countless holidays ‘over the hills and far away’, I vowed to give something back in gratitude for the spiritual inspiration which this district has given me (including battling with a Force 11 gale near Styhead Tarn).

“Wordsworth could be comically naive but also as profound as is possible to be. My life as an orchestral viola player has been filled with jibes from second violinists and remarks from cellists such as “Now, if you were a *real* man you would play the cello!” I certainly know what Wordsworth felt like when he read criticisms of his *Lyrical Ballads* in the *Edinburgh Review* that accused him of ‘perverseness and bad taste’.

“An irony is that while I seriously attempted to set many of Wordsworth’s texts to music, I learnt afterwards that his favourite instrument was the cuckoo clock!”



Michael Smith 2007

## Appendix Two

### 2009 selection from the oratorio, 'The Prelude' by Michael J Smith

The list is presented in order of performance at the premiere at Ryton, Gateshead on Tyne, on December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009. There were 180 numbers in the original 10-hour long work. Only 14 were performed at Ryton. The approximate performance times are given at the end of every number.

*Unless otherwise stated, the references to the books and lines from the text are from the 1850 version of 'The Prelude', prepared from Wordsworth's manuscripts and presented for publication by Mary Wordsworth, his widow.*

1. **'Dear native regions'** (composed by the boy Wordsworth in 1786: 'In anticipation at leaving school') *Opus 98, no. 1*  
*Aria: William Wordsworth as a boy (1'50")*
2. **'Oh, there is a blessing in this gentle breeze'** (Book 1, 1-6) *Opus 98, no. 3*  
*Chorus / Dorothy (1'20")*
3. **'Days of sweet leisure'** (Book 1, 43-45) *Opus 98, no. 7*  
*Chorus / Dorothy (1'35")*
4. **'When Spring had warmed the cultured vale'** (Book 1, 326 – 329) *Opus 98, no. 11*  
*Chorus / William / Dorothy (2'06")*
5. **'Through later years'** (Book 1, 635-638 &.644-645) *Opus 98, no 20*  
*Recitative and Aria: William (2'15")*
- \*6. **'How awful is the might of souls'** (Book 3, 167-180 & 190-193) *Opus 98, no. 29*  
*Recitative: William / Chorus (4'10")*
- \*7. **'Yet wherefore speak'** (Book 5, 183-191) *Opus 99, no. 7*  
*Chorus: Soprano / Alto (3'18")*
- \*8. **'For what we are'** (Book 5, 210-222) *Opus 99, no. 8*  
*Dorothy / Chorus: Tenor / Bass) 5'05"*
- \*9. **Esthwaite Lake** (Book 5, 26-459) *Opus 99, no. 12*  
*Symphonic Sketch for String Orchestra (4'00")*
10. **'Oh, next to one dear state of bliss'** (Book 13, 120-127) *Opus 102, no. 10*  
*Aria: Dorothy (3'20")*
11. **'The lonely roads'** (Book 13, 161-167) *Opus 102, no. 12*  
*Recit: William (2'14")*
12. **'For only then am I at rest'** (from 'Written in very early youth') *Opus 102, no. 22*  
*Duet: Dorothy / William (3'30")*
13. **"Our birth is but a sleeping and a forgetting"** (from 'Intimations of Immortality')  
*Opus 102, no. 23*  
*Children's Chorus / Dorothy / William as a boy (3'45")*
14. **'Prophets of Nature'** (Book 14, 446-456) *Opus 102, no. 21*  
*Chorus / Children's Chorus (2'00")*

**NB.** At Ryton, the pieces marked \* were omitted; at the time of preparation of this edition, choral numbers 6, 7 & 8 have not yet been publically performed. Also at Ryton, the order of the last 3 numbers, as printed here in appendix Two, was different from the order in the manuscript, which ran: *Prophets of Nature, For only then am I at rest, Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting.*

Smith's vocal intentions in *Prophets of Nature*, Opus 102, no. 21, are indicated in this manuscript. However, in the performance at Ryton, the SATB parts were sung by women and children, and the semi chorus was sung by the adult choir. The distribution of voices in this number is therefore at the discretion of the Music Director.

*Esthwaite Lake* was first performed in November 2011 at the Theater de Speeldoos, Den Bosse, the Netherlands, by I Consonanti Chamber Orchestra, with which Michael played during his retirement. The conductor was Wolf Eekhof.

The text of Wordsworth's *Prelude: Book 13 line 127* reads 'From which it would be misery to stir'. Smith copied this down exactly in his preparatory notes, but in his manuscript version of *Oh next to one dear state of bliss (Opus 102 no.10)* he substitutes the word 'part' for 'stir', and this word was sung at Ryton.

In bar 45 of, *Yet wherefore speak*, the viola plays higher than the violins; however, this is as Smith's original manuscript.

**To find out more about Michael Smith and the composition of the entire oratorio, and to listen to the performance at Ryton, see Michael's website: [www.mjsmith.eu](http://www.mjsmith.eu)**

***The performance by Ryton Community Choir, conducted by David Murray, took place in Gateshead on December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009, with the following:-***

Katherine Moore (Soprano)    Mark Anyan (Bass Baritone)    Ian Wright (Treble)

Ryton Choral Society

Bishopwearmouth Young Singers

**Violin**

Martin Hughes    Pauline Aitcheson    Marion Broome    Vince Fleming

**Viola**

Noel Broome    Laura Newton

**Cello**

Ruth Waterson    Eleanor Leckie    Christopher Murray

**Bass**

Alan Easterbrook

**Oboe**

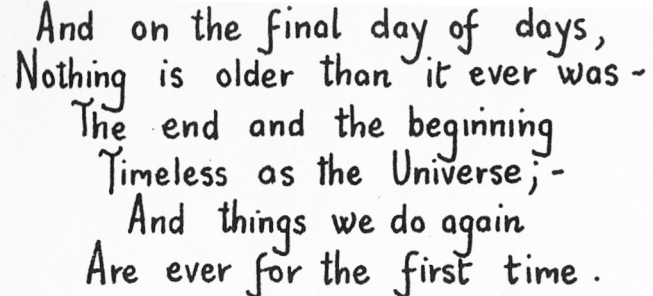
Philip Cull

**Clarinet**

Jennifer Murray

**Piano**

Eileen Bown



And on the final day of days,  
Nothing is older than it ever was -  
The end and the beginning  
Timeless as the Universe; -  
And things we do again  
Are ever for the first time .

*Indian astrologers forecast the end of the world:* Michael Smith, c. 1961

*Susan Hedworth*