DUO SERAPHIM

An anthem for Trinity Sunday, 1963, at King’s College, Cambridge

Philip Tagg
About the anthem

In 1962 I was a very young man. I hadn’t even left school. I loved playing the church organ, I was a big Bartók fan (I still am) and, attending school in Cambridge, I hardly ever missed an opportunity to hear the King’s College Choir do evensong if Byrd, Weelkes, Tomkins or any other member of the Tudor gang was on the menu. In that same year King’s College announced a prize for a new anthem for Trinity. I leapt at the opportunity, not so much because of the chance of winning the princely sum of £5 (= £75 in today’s money) as because the winning anthem would be performed by the College Choir at Matins the following year (1963). In late May 1962 I locked myself in a school music practice room for several hours a day during a whole week and managed to come up with something that apparently met with the judges’ favour. I was delighted to learn from none other than David Willcocks (→) that I was one of the prize’s two winners.

As promised, the Choir of King’s College (Cambridge) sang Duo Seraphim at Matins on Trinity Sunday 1963. I thought they made a really good job of it: clear, clean singing and plenty of ‘go’—no poncing about. It was great! I was so grateful and wrote a short letter of thanks to David Willcocks. His reply is shown (←) here. The anthem has to my knowledge only been performed on that one occasion.

Duo Seraphim isn’t easily sung but it’s far from impossible and, judging from reactions in 1963, it’s fun. It’s set for max. 8 voices (SSAATTBB) but a lot of it runs a 6 (SSATTB). It sounds best if ‘the two seraphim’ (SS and TT) sing in ‘collegiate stereo’ (Decani/Cantoris). You’ll hear influences from not only Bartók and Byrd: there’s also some Hi-Los in there! The only differences between this and the original edition are: [1] 2 bars of dubious close harmony have been cut; [2] word setting is better in the melismatic passages.

Philip Tagg, Huddersfield, January 2016
DUO SERAPHIM

Anthem for Trinity by Philip Tagg (1962)

Allegro ($\approx 176$)

Dec. S

Can.

S

Can.

Dec.

Can.

Dec.

Can.

Dec.

Can.

Dec.

Can.

Dec.

Can.

Dec.

Can.

Dec.

Can.

Dec.

Can.

Dec.

Can.

Dec.

Can.
Tagg: Duo Seraphim (1962)

Musematic Edutainment, Huddersfield, 2016
Tagg: Duo Seraphim (1962)