

JULIAN DAWES: LAUNCH OF CD: ECHOES OF THE SOUL

A Brief Introduction by Alex Knapp

The Jewish Museum

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and privilege for me to have been invited to introduce Julian Dawes: the man and his music. I have known Julian and Ann for nearly three decades and we have become really close friends.

Now, Julian is an extremely versatile musician: his professional career, spanning over sixty years, has encompassed working as a soloist, accompanist, teacher, and – perhaps primarily – as a composer.

In all his works, whether they be sacred or secular, instrumental or orchestral, vocal or choral, for theatre or for television, his musical manifesto has always been “accessibility with integrity”. His highest aspiration is to express his inner life, and the outer world and worlds around him. For Julian, musical form and architecture are important factors; and yet his priority is to keep closely in touch with human feelings. Therefore, much of his writing is full of deep emotion and reflects the principles of musical Romanticism.

The influences upon his music are indeed eclectic: classical and contemporary Western art music, popular idioms, Jazz and Blues, and – of particular interest this evening – Jewish music.

What Julian brings to Jewish Music is unique. He was born into a Christian family in the Midlands during World War 2, and his earliest musical training included singing as a child chorister in

two cathedral choirs, where he was steeped in plainchant and the Anglican tradition. He has spoken of the powerful impression made upon him by, for example, Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* - and later, the creative impact of his instructors, Hubert Dawkes and Herbert Howells, at the Royal College of Music.

And yet, interestingly, from early childhood, he felt an affinity for Judaism and Jewishness – an intuition that grew and developed over the years, and which culminated in his conversion at the age of 40. Ever since then, he has written music that illustrates a distinctive fusion of elements deriving - on the one hand - from his upbringing and the early decades of his life and – on the other - from his adopted religion.

Which brings us to *Echoes of the Soul*, the CD whose much anticipated Launch we celebrate this evening!

This recording is, indeed, a treasure trove, comprising nearly 30 tracks of chamber music inspired by Jewish themes, ranging from works for solo piano; various combinations of mezzo-soprano, tenor and baritone with piano; childrens' voices with piano; unaccompanied chorus; and finally a work for flute and piano to round off the CD. The music covers the entire gamut of moods, ranging all the way from poignant and tragic to joyful and humorous. Some of the melodies are based on traditional Jewish modality; and Julian has clothed these in beautiful and yet sometimes extremely unconventional harmony. It takes a great artist to know how to “break the rules” (as it were) with such consummate skill and effectiveness!

Languages range from English to Hebrew and Aramaic. Some of the texts are ancient, some modern; some familiar, others less so; yet all are compelling. All the artists involved with this recording are supremely accomplished and perform with total sincerity and sensitivity.

The CD includes a set of insert notes, replete with invaluable information about Julian, each of the works, durations, texts in original languages (plus translations into English, where appropriate), and illustrations, etc.

This recording is a precious gem, and it deserves to form part of the collection of every *aficionado* of Jewish music, regardless of religious background or affiliation. For I believe that Julian is one of the most significant twentieth- and twenty-first century composers working in the field of Jewish art music anywhere in the world.

I'd like to close this brief introduction by quoting the eminent musicologist and music critic, Dr Malcolm Miller, who has, with great insight and perception, placed Julian in the pantheon of contemporary Western composers with these words:

“Amongst his twentieth-century English influences are the pastoralism and extended tonality of Herbert Howells, the richness of Walton, the elegant delicacy of Berkeley and the jazzy impetus of Rodney Bennett; wider European influences include the caustic irony of Shostakovich and Kurt Weill, and the rhythmic impetus of Prokofiev and Stravinsky. Yet Dawes welds from these influences an individual voice that is both distinctive and refreshing, displaying assured craftsmanship and characterful invention.”

Thank you!

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