

THE DREAM OF GERONTIUS at CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 17th at 8pm

TICKETS: £15, £12 and £5

at the door and from the Box Office Oxford Playhouse

Soon to be heard at Oxford Cathedral, is the second performance of a new setting of *The Dream of Gerontius*. It is hard to imagine any music associated with this wonderful poem from the hand of the Blessed John Henry Newman other than the music of Sir Edward Elgar and, perhaps, the music of the composers who have set some of the verses as hymns – such as *Firmly I believe* and, of course, *Praise to the Holiest*.

Julien Chilcott-Monk, the composer of this new setting, is at pains to stress that his intention is to focus the attention of the audience entirely on the conversation between the *Soul* and the *Guardian Angel*, who guides the soul to his Particular Judgement. The music throws the spotlight upon this conversation, which is spoken by two actors – in this performance, **Robert Hardy** (*Gerontius/Soul*), the fine veteran of the Shakespearean Henrys, of Churchill, of Prince Albert, and so on; and **Neil Nisbet** (*Guardian Angel*), of *The Trainer* etc. Neil also appeared with Robert Hardy in an episode of *All Creatures Great and Small*.

The music is provided by a small *a cappella* choir – **Vox Humana**- singing the portions of the poem assigned to the *Assistants*, *Angelicals*, and *Demons*. The verses from the mouths of the *Angel of the Stairway* and the *Angel of the Agony* are sung by the Mezzo-Soprano soloist, **Elizabeth Barlow**, and the full choir respectively. The soloist also sings the *Go on thy way Christian Soul* but the original plainchant *Proficiscere* is sung by two male voices. Chilcott-Monk uses parts of the Ordinary of the Mass throughout in order to emphasize other layers of meaning within the poem. The performance ends with the *Agnus Dei*.

Chilcott-Monk also provides a sung prelude containing hints of the musical ideas to be heard, the text woven into the *Pater noster* suggesting, perhaps, that Gerontius has these themes and oft-spoken prayers and phrases running through his mind before he begins to speak. Throughout, distant chimes are heard keeping the spoken word in touch with the musical world. Other percussion instruments are used sparingly.