CODEBREAKER – A NEW WORK BY JAMES McCARTHY
COMMISSIONED BY HERTFORDSHIRE CHORUS

CODEBREAKER, a major new choral work celebrating the life of Alan Turing, will receive its world premiere performance on Saturday 26th April 2014 in London’s Barbican Hall. The work will include texts from some of the most well-known of poets including Wilfred Owen, Sara Teasdale and Walt Whitman, as well as Oscar Wilde and Robert Burns, with a mezzo soprano soloist providing the voice of Turing’s mother.

The work has been written by one of the brightest and most talented of young UK composers, James McCarthy, whose previous major work, 17 Days, about the Chilean mining accident, received rave critical reviews after its premiere in February 2012.

Hertfordshire Chorus, one of the finest choirs in the UK, has commissioned the work and the driving force behind this has been David Temple, one of the UK’s top choral conductors.

ALAN TURING was one of the most influential scientists of the 20th century. In 1936 he showed that a set of simple mechanical operations (a ‘Turing machine’) was sufficient to compute any mathematical or logical formula. He became the leading cryptanalyst at Bletchley Park during World War II, was head of the Naval Hut which cracked the Nazi U-boat cyphers, and was therefore instrumental in turning round the war. These machines (‘bombe’s’) were, in effect, the forerunners of digital computers. In 1945 he wrote the world’s first detailed specification for a universal digital programmable computer.

Turing pioneered the field of artificial intelligence. He proposed the ‘Turing Test’ whereby a machine is deemed to be ‘intelligent’ if a human interrogator can’t distinguish it from a human based only on printed responses.

Alan Turing was also homosexual, at a time when such activity was illegal. In 1952 he was convicted of gross indecency, lost his security clearance and avoided prison only by agreeing to a course of hormone injections. In June 1954 he was found dead from cyanide poisoning. The coroner’s verdict was suicide. In 2009, Prime Minister Gordon Brown issued an apology on behalf of the UK Government, but there has been no pardon.

JAMES McCARTHY (b.1979) is a composer of choral music, opera and orchestral works. He has been commissioned by many ensembles, including Hertfordshire Chorus, Crouch End Festival Chorus, Scottish Opera and Canty. His music has been broadcast on BBC Radio 3, BBC London 94.9 and RTE Lyric FM. He studied music at Royal Holloway, University of London, where his composition tutor was Simon Holt.

James’s most high profile work to date is 17 Days, a choral work commissioned by Crouch End Festival Chorus inspired by the Chilean mining accident of 2010. It was
Premiered in February 2012 in the Barbican Hall, London, to critical acclaim. The Independent said “the overall effect was remarkably engaging: plenty of interest all the way through with lovely word setting which built, in an organic and integrated way, to a genuinely moving climax.” The Times said “McCarthy’s setting of Emily Dickenson’s ‘Hope’ was the stirring peak in a work that made performers and audience alike feel exalted.”

Herfordshire Chorus is one of the country’s finest choirs, performing a wide variety of works in prestigious venues throughout the UK. It makes regular appearances at the Barbican Hall in London and The Sage, Gateshead, and has performed in recent times in the Royal Festival Hall, the Royal Albert Hall and regularly in St Albans Cathedral.

The Chorus has performed a number of times with the BBC Concert Orchestra and the Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra, has given concerts under Daniele Gatti and with José Carreras, and has been broadcast on BBC Radio 2 and 3, and Classic FM. Members of the choir are in demand for recording work and for appearing in major concerts, such as the BBC Proms. The choir’s versatility is perhaps best demonstrated by its appearances on stage with Noel Gallagher on his sell-out UK tour.

The Chorus is well known for its passion for commissioning new music. In recent years this has produced Mass in Blue and Ode to a Nightingale by Will Todd, with Mass in Blue being one of the most successful of modern pieces, with over 100 performances across the world to date. Other commissions include Ice from Orlando Gough, Land of Light from Howard Haigh, Solaris from Steve Block, and Beach Boys Classics arrangements from David Bedford.

Hertfordshire Chorus has a busy programme of its own concerts and other events. Recent major concerts have included Duruflé’s Requiem, Allegri’s Miserere, Kodaly’s Missa Brevis, Beethoven’s Missa Solemnis, Mozart’s Mass in C Minor and Mendelssohn’s Die Erste Walpurgisnacht and Psalm 42. The Chorus will be in the Royal Festival Hall in June 2013 performing a programme to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Queen’s Coronation, with music from the 1953 service and Walton’s Belshazzar’s Feast.

David Temple is one of the country’s leading choral conductors. He has been Musical Director of Hertfordshire Chorus since September 2000. Under his direction the Chorus has performed a wide range of music, including several world premieres of commissions. David is also musical director of Crouch End Festival Chorus.

David’s work with the pop and rock world includes collaborations with Ray Davies, Oasis, Goldfrapp, and with Noel Gallagher on his High Flying Birds CD and UK and Ireland Arena Tour. David has been the regular chorus master for Ennio Morricone on all his UK visits since 2001 and also for Andrea Bocelli.

Enquiries concerning Codebreaker should be addressed to Robin Seaman, Concerts & Engagements Director of Hertfordshire Chorus – robin.seaman@talk21.com