Conquering the Antarctic: The Scott Centenary Concert Tour

A century ago, Captain Scott and his team set out on an epic adventure...to reach the South Pole.

Leading UK orchestra, City of London Sinfonia in collaboration with the Scott Polar Research Institute (SPRI), and as part of the Scott 100 Festival of Events, embarks on an ambitious concert tour in February, to celebrate the centenary of the British Antarctic Expedition of 1910-12.

This landmark concert tour seeks to retell the inspiring human story behind this epic expedition to the South Pole through music, words and photography, and features excerpts from Vaughan Williams’ film score Scott of the Antarctic, interwoven with moving readings from Captain Robert Falcon Scott’s expedition diary and letters. The iconic music of Vaughan Williams’ Symphony No. 7 (Sinfonia Antartica) will also be performed, alongside stunning projections of expedition photographs by Herbert Ponting, now digitally restored in high definition.

At the heart of the programme is the world premiere of a new work by British composer Cecilia McDowall, entitled Seventy Degrees Below Zero. The cantata for solo voice and orchestra was inspired by a phrase written by Scott to his wife: “Dear, it is not easy to write because of the cold – 70 degrees below zero.” Composer McDowall found “the restrained, personal writings of Scott, set against a backdrop of human endeavour and resilience in such inhospitable terrain, deeply affecting and a rich resource on which to draw.” Featuring leading British tenor Robert Murray, the piece sets McDowall’s music to words by poet Seán Street, who uses as his inspiration entries in Scott’s...
expedition journals. “Scott’s journals are full of quotations from classical and Victorian poetry,” says Street. “His was a poetic, as well as a scientific journey.”

The tour visits Birmingham, Cambridge, Cardiff and Cheltenham between 3-8 February before coming to London as part of Music Nation a Countdown Event for the London 2012 Festival.

This tour is made possible through the generous support of Arts Council England, The Colwinston Trust, The RVW Trust, The Summerfield Charitable Trust and The Vaughan Williams Charitable Trust.

Full concert details:

**Vaughan Williams** Excerpts from *Scott of the Antarctic* film score
(with readings from Scott’s diary and letters)

**Cecilia McDowall** *Seventy Degrees Below Zero*
(world première)

**Vaughan Williams** Symphony No 7 *Sinfonia Antartica*
(with original expedition photographs by Herbert Ponting)

City of London Sinfonia
Bath Camerata+
Holst Singers±
Stephen Layton conductor
Robert Murray tenor
Katherine Watson soprano
TBC narrator

**Venues & Box Office details:**

3 February 2012 Symphony Hall, Birmingham ± 0121 780 3333/ thsh.co.uk
4 February 2012 Corn Exchange, Cambridge ± 01223 357851/ cornex.co.uk
7 February 2012 St David’s Hall, Cardiff+ 029 2087 8444/ stdavidshallcardiff.co.uk
8 February 2012 Town Hall, Cheltenham+ 0844 576 2210/cheltenhamtownhall.org.uk
3 March 2012 Cadogan Hall, London±* 020 7730 4500/ cadoganhall.com

Tickets are available to purchase through the box offices of the individual venues.

+ Bath Camerata perform at concert; ±Holst Singers perform at concert

*The performance on 3 March 2012 at Cadogan Hall forms part of Music Nation, a Countdown Event to the London 2012 Festival.*
Captain Scott and the British Antarctic Expedition of 1910-12 – background

In June 1910, Captain Robert Falcon Scott and his team of 64 men set out on their ship Terra Nova from London via Cardiff (where they stocked up on coal) to reach the Antarctic. The twin aims of the expedition were to achieve the South Pole for Britain and to undertake a comprehensive scientific survey of the continent. In the first year, huge quantities of scientific data were collected, vast areas were mapped and depots of food and fuel were laid in preparation for the journey to the Pole.

In January 1912, Scott, Wilson, Bowers, Oates and Evans achieved their goal and reached the South Pole, only to find that the Norwegian Roald Amundsen had beaten them. The Polar Party began the long march back to base, along which Evans died during the descent of the Beardmore Glacier. With supplies running low, Captain Oates walked out of the tent into a snowstorm, with the immortal words “I’m just going outside and may be some time,” sacrificing himself in the hope that his companions would have sufficient rations left to return home. Trapped by terrifying blizzard conditions only 11 nautical miles from the depot which represented safety, Scott and his remaining companions, Wilson and Bowers, are believed to have perished on 29 March 1912. Knowing that they were dying, the men wrote moving letters to their loved ones, which are now preserved in the Polar Museum at the Scott Polar Research Institute.
City of London Sinfonia – Notes to editors

Firmly established as one of the UK’s leading chamber orchestras, City of London Sinfonia was founded in 1971 by the late Richard Hickox and celebrates its 40th anniversary this year. The Orchestra is led by Stephen Layton (Artistic Director & Principal Conductor) and Michael Collins (Principal Conductor).

City of London Sinfonia makes regular appearances at all the major London concert halls and venues, as well as St Paul’s Cathedral and other venues in the City of London. It has been resident orchestra at the capital’s popular Opera Holland Park since 2004 and holds a long-standing residency in High Wycombe (birthplace of Richard Hickox), as well as being a regular guest at major UK festivals.

City of London Sinfonia has made over 100 recordings, including a series of operas by Benjamin Britten on the CHANDOS label, and won a Grammy Award for Best Opera for its recording of Peter Grimes. The orchestra’s latest release is a recording of Weber’s Clarinet and Horn Concertos on the CHANDOS label.

The Orchestra’s Meet the Music education and outreach programme, founded in 1988, was one of the first established by a UK orchestra. Musicians spend approximately 100 days a year making music with a wide range of groups, young and old, throughout the country, including a long standing residency at the world famous Great Ormond Street Hospital.

City of London Sinfonia receives no regular, core support from Arts Council England. It raises all its income from fees, ticket sales, corporate sponsorship, grants and donations. In September 2011, the Orchestra launched the Shaping the Future fundraising campaign, which aims to raise £1.8 million over the next three years.

Scott Polar Research Institute – Notes to editors

The Scott Polar Research Institute at the University of Cambridge is home to unrivalled expertise and resources about the Arctic and Antarctic regions. The Institute’s scholars are engaged in pioneering research in fields ranging from polar marine science to ice physics, and contribute to discussions on polar issues with scholars and policy-makers from around the world. The Institute also houses the world’s most comprehensive polar library and archive.

The Institute’s Library, Archives and Museum provide members of the general public - as well as scientists, government bodies, industry and polar inhabitants - with vital information on a range of polar topics, including climate change, management of natural resources and historic polar expeditions.

Founded in 1920 to honour the achievements of Captain R.F. Scott and his colleagues who died on their return from the South Pole in 1912, the Scott Polar Research Institute is dedicated to perpetuating the legacy of polar exploration and science through research, education and public outreach activities.