



EXETER
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

The Original 1916 film by Geoffrey Malins & John McDowell
with music by Laura Rossi

COMMEMORATIVE PROGRAMME
SATURDAY 11 FEBRUARY 2017, EXETER CATHEDRAL

Part of **SOMME100FILM**, an international project
to mark the 100th anniversary of the battle.
www.Somme100film.com



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Phil Hobbs
Chairman

Chairman's Welcome

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to Exeter Cathedral for a showing of this moving and most interesting film. A particular welcome to our President, The Lord Mayor of Exeter.

As a former history lecturer, I showed this film regularly to my classes and remember the deep impact it had on students of all ages, and that was without the added poignancy of the specially commissioned music. I hope that the information provided in the programme will help to put tonight's performance into context.

The Exeter Symphony Orchestra is grateful to the Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral for the use of this wonderful venue, and of course to the *Somme 100 Film* team and their sponsors for bringing this event to Exeter. As always, the orchestra is particularly grateful to our own local sponsors, *Stephens & Scown*, *Old Mill*, *Millbrook Village* and *Toucan Design* for their continuing support and without whom events such as this would be extremely difficult to launch.

Thank you for your support and details of our future concerts are on the back of the programme.

Phil Hobbs

Chair of Exeter Symphony Orchestra



Brian Northcott
Musical Director

Musical Director's Welcome

'The Somme remains the most harrowing place-name in the annals not only of Great Britain, but of the many former dependencies that shed their blood on that scenic river.' So wrote David Frum a century later. Nearly 60,000 were killed or injured on the first day and in total, more than a million men were wounded or killed in one of the bloodiest battles in human history.

I welcome you all to this unique and thought-provoking remembrance, and particularly those whose relatives were killed or injured in the actual battle. The film, with the accompanying music, will say more than I can even begin to write, and it is with pleasure that the ESO has such very close connections with the composer, Laura Rossi, firstly as a playing member of the orchestra, and then in performing a score written specially for us, the first world performance of 'Voices of Remembrance' in November 2015. We welcome her and members of her family.

Details of the performance can be read in the following programme, but it would not be me if I didn't close on a couple of personal thoughts. History is the study of past events and an attempt to both understand and learn from them. I feel that we rarely do, unfortunately, and the current deaths of innocent children, men and women in various parts of the world would seem to show this. 'Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely' – a well known statement perhaps, but if we look back over the last 100 years, and at the current world situation, we find corrupt power, religion and greed all well in control – or am I wrong?

Enjoy the event, perhaps also the chance to reflect, and as a certain late comedian would say – "May your God go with you".

Brian Northcott



An Introduction to The Battle of the Somme, courtesy of Dr Toby Haggith

Shot and screened in 1916, *The Battle of the Somme* was the first feature length documentary about war. In the first three months of its release the film was seen by around 20 million people in Britain and Ireland, informing and challenging the public with its images of warfare, and changing the way both cinema and film was perceived.

The film was shot by just two cameramen; Geoffrey Malins and J B McDowell. Filming took place between 25 June and 9 July 1916, covering the build-up and opening stages of the Battle of the Somme. The film is definitely a propaganda film, though it is filmed and presented in the style of a documentary, and was made in response to a real desire from the British public for news of and images from the battlefield. It was created to rally civilian support, particularly for the production of munitions, and British soldiers are portrayed as well-fed, respectful to prisoners and well-looked after.

The structure of the film is simple; the first two reels cover the preparations for the infantry attack, the third reel covers the attack on the 1 July 1916 and the next two, the aftermath of the battle. Anticipating the desire of the audience to spot their loved ones, the cameramen captured as many faces as possible, often encouraging the men to turn and acknowledge the camera. The inter-titles, written by the War Office, are a crucial element of the film. They provide commentary, point out important details, guide the audience to an appropriate response, reinforce propaganda messages, and reassure the viewer. Some scenes such as the 'over the top' sequence are now understood to have been staged. However, historians estimate that overall only 90 seconds of the film was staged. An estimated 13% of the film depicts images of wounded or dead soldiers including some distressing images of communal graves. The depiction of British dead is unique to this film in the history of British non-fiction cinema. Despite the depiction of death and injury throughout the film, the overall feeling remains that the Battle of the Somme was a military success.



Purpose of the film

- The producers of the film had expected that the offensive on the Somme would be a great success, so the film was to record the victory and demonstrate the effectiveness of the British Army. It was hoped that the example of the brave soldiers would rally civilian support for the war effort.
- Kitchener had banned all photography and film from taking place until late 1915. The War Office agreed to the presence of cameramen at the front before the Battle of the Somme following the lobbying of the British Topical Committee for War Films and pressure from the film industry who were keen to respond to the public appetite for real footage from the front.
- British soldiers are portrayed as well-fed, well-motivated, well-clothed and well-equipped. There is an emphasis on the care and medical assistance that the soldiers received, and indeed the chivalry shown to enemy prisoners.
- It would also have been hoped that the film would help with recruiting in Dominion and Empire countries where men volunteered to fight.
- A further purpose would have been to encourage British men to respond to their call-up papers, as many did not come forward after conscription was introduced; 93,000 men failed to appear at the recruiting office when called-up.
- Although understood to be a propaganda film in its nature, much of the style of the filming is documentary.

Impact of the film

- The film was first privately shown to David Lloyd George on the 2 August 1916 and the first major screening took place on 10 August at the Scala Theatre before its release to the public on 21 August. It continued to be distributed for at least five months afterwards.
- British and Irish audiences flocked to the cinemas in the hope of seeing someone they might know and to see what the fighting on the front was really like. The film was immensely popular and aroused great interest – By October 1916 the film had received around 20 million admissions (the UK population at the time was 43 million).
- The film was shown in Exeter Theatre on December 2nd and 4th 1916.
- The public understood that the 'realism' within the Battle of the Somme film made it different from the dramatic portrayals of war they had seen before.
- Audiences were offered an almost tangible link to their family members on the Battlefront. Indeed, the film was often advertised on the premise that people may be able to spot their loved ones on screen. The soldiers filmed were also fully aware of the possibility that they might be seen by people they knew.
- Before the Battle of the Somme film, cinema-going was not perceived as respectable by the upper classes and indeed by many of the officers serving in the British Army. The film helped to raise the status of film from a trashy form of mass-entertainment to a more serious and poignant form of communication

Restoration

- IWM took ownership of the film in 1920, by which time the original negative was already very worn owing to the great popularity of the film. The original negative was subsequently lost to irretrievable cellulose nitrate decomposition, and preservation and restoration work is based on master copies made by IWM in 1931.
- In November 2005, IWM embarked upon a project to restore the film to its original quality in order to engage contemporary audiences with its content.
- Digital restoration is a technique where the original film is scanned frame by frame so that each of the images can be amended and improved using powerful software. There are 80,000 frames in the Battle of the Somme film.
- Due to the poor quality of many of the original images, the restored film does not create a perfected version. A number of breaks, blemishes and poorer quality shots are still evident.

More information about the Somme100 project, along with audio and video clips are available online at: <http://www.somme100film.com/>



The Somme Campaign

- The Battle of the Somme was the first major offensive on the Western Front in which the British Army took the leading role.
- It was Britain's contribution to a coordinated offensive (with France, Italy and Russia) across Europe to defeat the Germans after the setbacks of 1915. Due to a preemptive strike (on 21st February) by the Germans on the French Army at Verdun, the most pressing aim of the Somme offensive was to force the Germans to divert troops away from this front, thus relieving the French Army which was locked in a struggle for survival. But the British commanders also wanted to inflict heavy losses on the enemy and were hopeful that the weight of their initial onslaught on the Somme could breach a substantial sector of the German lines, leading to a rout
- Planning for the Battle was very detailed with the overall strategy aiming to carry out a sustained artillery bombardment over German positions for five days, followed by the infantry attack and further artillery barrage directed at secondary line trenches.
- Since initial recruitment campaigns in 1914, including the widespread recruitment of the so called 'Pals Battalion', the British Army had increased its size and strength hugely. By the time the Somme campaign began 60% of the British Army had no battle experience.
- Given the scale of the preliminary bombardment, British soldiers were told they would find the barbed wire blown away and the German soldiers dead in their trenches. However, the bombardment did not destroy the deep German dugouts and as the British lines of troops advanced, the German machine guns began to fire.
- The first day of the battle of the 1 July was the bloodiest in the history of the British Army with 57,740 casualties including 19,240 killed.



The Music

The Battle of the Somme was made before the era of recorded sound on film. However, in common with all cinema showings, it was always screened with accompanying music. Music played a number of important functions in the cinema. It covered the sound of the projector, noises from the audience and filled the gaps during reel changes. It also enhanced the meaning of the film and guided reactions from the audience.

Orchestral music was seen as a way of attracting middle and upper class audiences. Some musicians learnt composed scores to accompany the film but most improvised.

The cinema musician J.Morton Hutcheson devised a medley of 41 existing pieces of classical and popular pieces to accompany *The Battle of the Somme* which a number of cinemas chose to use. Most of the pieces selected are up-tempo marches and loud overtures, but there are also more lyrical and slow-paced pieces to echo the scenes of the wounded and the dead.

Laura Rossi’s new score was commissioned to mark the 90th anniversary of *The Battle of the Somme* as a soundtrack for the digitally restored film. When embarking on her research on the film and the battle in preparation for her composition, Laura discovered that her great uncle, Fred Ainge, (whom she knew as he survived the war) was a stretcher-bearer attached to the 29th Division on 1 July 1916. In preparation for composing the new score she visited the Somme Battlefields, using Fred’s diaries to locate the areas in which he served. The re-mastered film was screened for the 90th anniversary of the Battle to a full house at the Queen Elizabeth Hall with the premiere of Laura’s orchestral score, performed by the Philharmonia Orchestra. It received a glowing 5 star review in *The Times*.

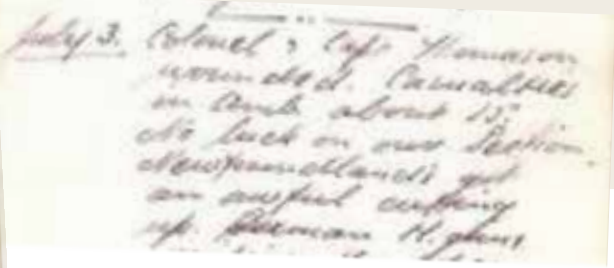
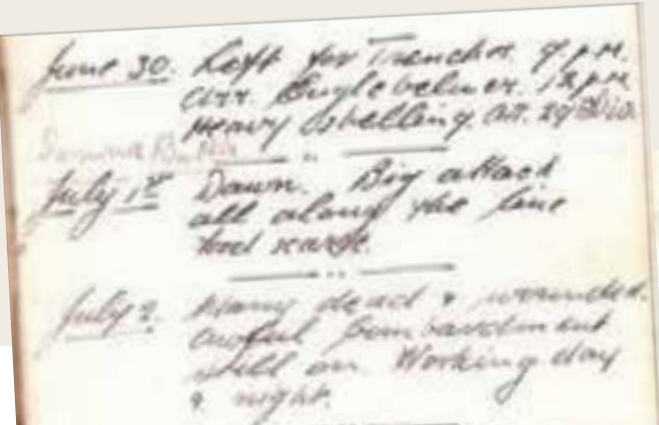
“And these troops in the mud grinned or stared at us to a new music score by Laura Rossi, brilliantly effective.”
Geoff Brown, The Times. *****

“I have watched the film so many times that when I sleep at night I sometimes see the soldiers’ faces! Watching this film brings you closer to the reality of the First World War, and I have come to feel very passionately that I want others to know more about it.”

Here Laura describes her experience of working on this film:

‘It was very challenging writing music for *The Battle of the Somme* because the film has some really abrupt changes of mood – for example the scene showing happy soldiers receiving their mail suddenly cuts to a pile of dead bodies in a crater – so it was hard to achieve the right tone and to make the music flow between such contrasting scenes.

I wanted to deal with some of the more shocking or distressing scenes in a sensitive way, not loading them with over-romantic or tragic music but providing something simple to give the viewer the space to think about what they are seeing on the screen. For example, for the famous trench rescue scene I decided just to use a couple of instruments, a solo oboe and harp, as I did not want the music to be too emotional or tell the audience what to feel. The images are powerful enough themselves.



Laura Rossi

Laura Rossi has written music extensively for film and television, including the critically acclaimed *London to Brighton*, *The Eichmann Show*, starring Martin Freeman and Anthony LaPaglia and *Song for Marion*, starring Vanessa Redgrave and Terence Stamp. She also co-wrote music to the 4 part BBC Drama series *Prisoners Wives* (series 2) directed by Harry Bradbeer. She has written music for ITV (including documentary series *Marking Time* and *Forgotten Pilots*), Fox Searchlight, Carlton TV (*The Real Sir Francis Drake*), HTV (*The Cotswold Canals*), Quintessence Films and the BBC. She has also written music for Discovery; Dan Snow’s *Battle of the Somme* and *Ancre* as well as scoring many short films.

Laura was a 2013 Oscar contender and was nominated for best score in the Beijing International Film Festival.

She has also scored many silent films including the British Film Institute’s *Silent Shakespeare* and the famous IWM 1916 films *The Battle of the Somme* and *The Battle of the Ancre*.

Her latest work *Voices of Remembrance* is a choral/ orchestral work featuring war poems read by Ralph Fiennes and Vanessa Redgrave. The music was commissioned by Boosey and Hawkes to mark the Centenary of the First World War. Exeter Symphony Orchestra is proud to have given the premiere performance of this work in November 2015, along with local chamber choir The St David’s Singers.

Laura’s music has been recorded and performed by the Philharmonia Orchestra, the London Musici Orchestra, London Contemporary Orchestra and the BBC Concert Orchestra. Her works have been performed at the Barbican, the Royal Festival Hall and the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London. Laura is also lecturer for film music at the London Film Academy. For more information please visit Laura’s website: <http://www.laurarossi.com/>



Laura’s local connections

Born into a musical family, Laura was educated at Hazledown Primary School, Teignmouth Community School and Exeter College. Her father, Denis Rossi, is a local Jazz pianist with his own jazz trio, Jazz Trilogy. Her mum Pauline sings in several local choirs and operatic societies, whilst her sister Anna also sings and plays piano and violin.

It was only after I had started working on this project and decided to visit the battlefields that my aunt told me my Great Uncle Fred had served on the Somme, and showed me his diaries. He was the only one of his pals in France who did not get killed. He was a stretcher-bearer, attached to the 29th Division on 1 July 1916, so it is possible he may even appear in the film. Discovering this close family connection, visiting the battlefields and witnessing some of the commemorative ceremonies this year made the whole project come to life for me; the battle feels much closer and I have a better appreciation of what it must have been like to be a soldier on the Somme.





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www.Somme100film.com





Forthcoming Concert Dates

25 MARCH 2017

THE SPRING CONCERT

7.30pm United Reformed Church, Southernhay, Exeter

Sir Edward Elgar - Serenade for Strings

William Sterndale Bennett - Piano Concerto No. 4

(soloist: Richard Deering)

Jean Sibelius - Karelia Suite

César Franck - Symphony in D minor

8 JULY 2017

THE SUMMER CONCERT

7.30 pm Exeter Cathedral, Exeter

Richard Wagner - The Ride of the Valkyries

Alex Roth - Fandangle

Zoltán Kodály - Dances of Galánta

Sir Arthur Bliss - A Colour Symphony

Antonin Dvorák - Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra in B minor (soloist: Raphael Wallfisch)

For tickets call 01392 285983

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