



Thomas Tallis Society Choir
Directed by Mark Wilde



ENGLISH SONG FOR CHOIR & PIANO

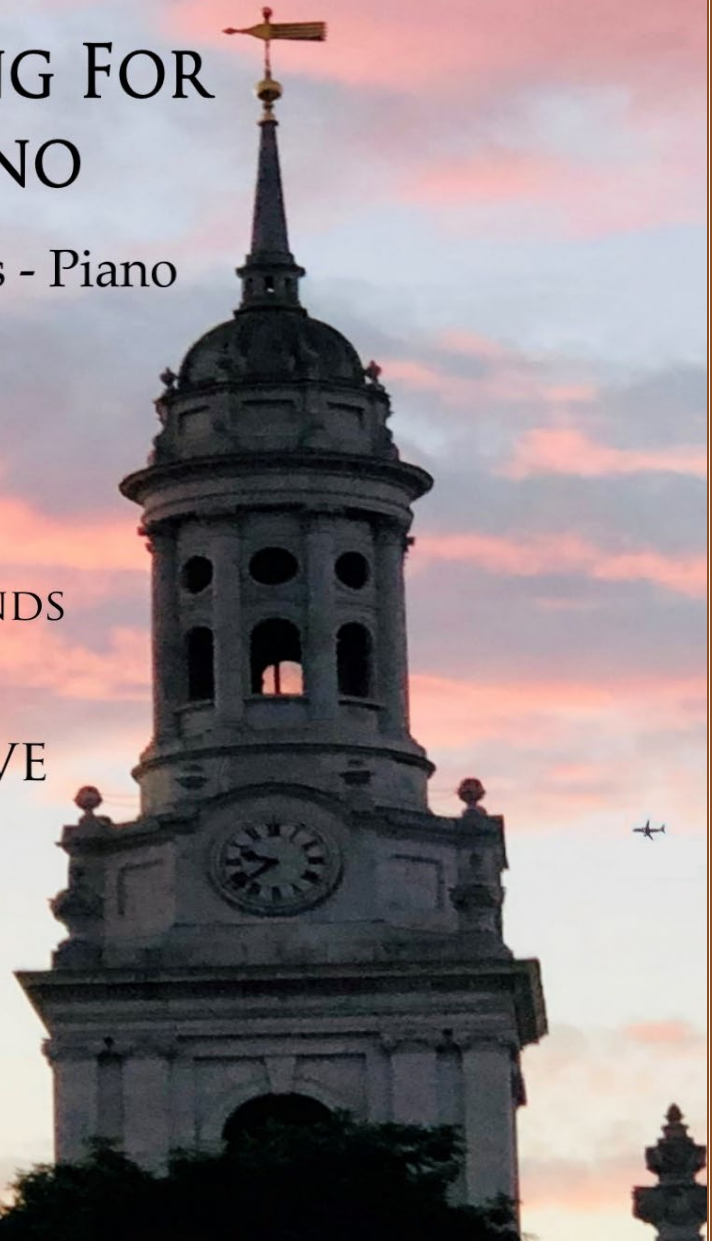
David Owen Norris - Piano

ELGAR

SCENES FROM THE
BAVARIAN HIGHLANDS

JONATHAN DOVE

THE PASSING OF
THE YEAR



In this evening's programme, we present something for which David and I share a great love; English Song. Song for choir and piano is quite a small but rich seam in the vocal canon, and the two sets by Elgar and Dove we perform this evening represent this. Along with the Dove, Vaughan Williams' setting of Three Shakespeare Songs shows us the other facet of English song which makes it stand proud in global musical output; the abundance and diversity of great poetry.

Since we started preparing for this concert, the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II has led us to reflect on the programme in the context of this seismic event. After much reflection and discussion we feel that, in some ways, it is a fitting tribute to Her Majesty; three great British composers whom the Sovereign had met and for whom they had composed or dedicated music; setting great English poetry from Shakespeare to Tennyson; and in Dove's dedication of The Passing of the Year in memory of his mother, we can reflect on King Charles III's personal loss.

Mark Wilde

17 September 2022

Scenes from the Bavarian Highlands (1895)

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

In the 1890s, Edward and Alice Elgar regularly holidayed in the Bavarian countryside – specifically, the region around Marmisch-Patenkirchen, which they had discovered after having attended three major Wagner performances at Bayreuth in 1892. They relished its spectacular landscapes, the convivial atmosphere, and the fact they were in a Catholic country. As Elgar wrote to a friend, “there were no Protestants... workmen carrying their rosaries...bells ringing at the elevation in the Mass at which people in the streets take off their hats and make the sign of the Cross...crucifixes on the roadsides...chapels to the blessed virgin”.

Over the next five years, the Elgars returned four more times. In 1894, they stayed for six weeks, and took walking excursions and tours. Back home in Malvern, Alice then wrote six poems in imitation of Bavarian folk verse. These were not just in fond memory of their holiday, but were written for the very practical reason that she knew her husband was having more success in getting partsongs published rather than any of his cantatas and oratorios. Thus prompted, Elgar set six of her verses, each subtitled after favourite places they had visited on their holidays.

The Dance (Sonnenbichl) – Elgar sets this in a dance which suggests both the vigour of the Austrian folk and also a touch of sentimentality.

False Love (Wamberg) – a perennial story of a young lover who discovers a rival courting at his beloved’s door.

Lullaby (In Hammersbach) – a devoted mother sings her son to sleep, notwithstanding the tempting sound of Zithers without.

Aspiration (Bei Sankt Anton) – here, Elgar pays tribute to the simple faith of the Bavarian people.

On the Alm (True Love, Hoch Alp) – a lover cannot help seeing or being reminded of his beloved by everything he sees or hears, and finally hastens to his rendezvous.

The Marksman (Bei Murnau) – a favourite Bavarian sport ends with triumph, unblushingly celebrated by Elgar with one of his grandest melodies.

Concert Allegro (1901)

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

Elgar’s only solo piano work intended for concert performance was composed in 1901, at the request of the pianist Fanny Davies. A former pupil of the legendary Clara Schumann, Davies had distinguished herself at Birmingham as early as 1886 with a performance of Robert Schumann’s Piano Concerto. Now in her early forties, she approached Elgar just as he was contemplating writing his First Symphony; “I am so disappointed if you can’t let me have just a wee ‘little Elgar’ for my recital on Dec: 2nd?? I wanted to have from ‘Purcell to Elgar’, I thought it would be such a delicious idea! I can’t have a really adequate nice English group without an Elgar in it, now can I? Won’t you write me a Study or an Impromptu – I could learn it *very* quickly if I had it...”.

Elgar, perhaps remembering his early years of playing piano at his father’s music shop, was moved to start composing such a work. As the pianist Clifford Curzon observed, some of the ideas suggest the keyboard flourishes of a piano-tuner test-driving an instrument he is servicing; yet among those ideas – or perhaps emerging from them – is a fine melody which appears in the work’s central E flat major section.

Three Shakespeare Songs (1951)

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

The British Federation of Music Festivals, of which Ralph Vaughan Williams was president, was planning to hold its regular National Competitive Festival in 1951 – the year of the Festival of Britain, planned by the Labour government to raise the nation’s spirit after the trauma of World War II. One of Vaughan Williams’ colleagues, Cecil Armstrong Gibbs, tried to persuade him that for such a special year he should compose a new test piece for the national choral competition. The great man seemed reluctant, but then – to Armstrong Gibbs’s surprise and delight – he was delivered not long afterwards “a fat envelope, registered and bearing the Dorking postmark” (Dorking being where Vaughan Williams then lived); “Inside was the MS of the

Three Shakespeare Songs dedicated to me and the briefest of notes which ran: 'Dear Armstrong. Here are three Shakespeare settings. Do what you like with them... Yours ever R.V.W.'

The first two songs (**Full Fathom Five, The Cloud-Capp'd Towers**) set texts from Shakespeare's final play, *The Tempest* – Vaughan Williams, then almost in his eighties, was apparently preoccupied by its themes of impermanence, mortality and transformation. In perfect contrast follows the fairy's song from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (**Over Hill, Over Dale**) – though perhaps, as Vaughan Williams's setting suggests, continuing the theme of impermanence.

The Passing of the Year (2000)

Jonathan Dove (b. 1959)

Jonathan Dove was, for many years, associated with Glyndebourne and has composed several operas, including the highly successful family opera *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (in the premiere of which our present conductor, Mark Wilde, played the villainous Cat!). Dove is even better known for his choral works, including *The Three Kings*, a carol commissioned for the Choir of King's College, Cambridge's Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols in the year 2000.

In that same year, Dove was commissioned to write a work for the London Symphony Chorus, the only stipulation being that it would be accompanied solely by piano. This put Dove in mind to compose something like a song-cycle, only sung by chorus rather than a solo singer (the work is described on the score as a 'Song cycle for double chorus and piano'). As Dove recalled in an interview; "I started looking for texts which I thought would be suitable for a large group of people to sing - something different from the intimate lyrics you might expect for a solo song. I was imagining a song-cycle, but it was only gradually that the idea emerged of a cycle following the cycle of the seasons".

The result was *The Passing of the Year*, dedicated to the memory of his mother, first performed at the Barbican on 18th March 2000 by the London Symphony Chorus under their conductor Stephen Westrop.

The seven movements of the cycle fall into three main sections according to poetic theme and content; the anticipation and arrival of summer (movements 1-3), the progress and eventual death of summer (movements 4-6), and the arrival of winter and the promise of the New Year (movement 7). This three-part structure is reinforced by the cycle's key scheme, as Dove has explained: "If the first movement ends at the end of 'Answer July' in C, then the last movement also ends in C. And 'Ring out, wild bells' makes the same journey from a minor to C major that the first three movements make... So it is like white note outer movements and black-note inner movements."

1. **Invocation** – This sets a single line from William Blake's *Introduction to the Songs of Experience*: 'O Earth, O Earth, return!' The piano part in particular creates a sense of bubbling anticipation.

2. **The narrow bud opens her beauties to the sun** – here Dove sets the song sung by Autumn, as imagined by Blake in his poem *To Autumn*. This is launched by an alto soloist (eventually followed by a tenor soloist), backed softly by the full choir whose murmuring is given a certain lilt thanks to the play of triplet rhythms against duple rhythms.

3. **Answer July** – this setting of a poem by Emily Dickinson is in the manner of an exciting scherzo.

4. **Hot sun, cool fire** – George Peele's poem is given a more languorous treatment, the chorus encouraged to sing with breathy tone and to sigh, as if almost overcome by a heatwave (an experience many of us will recall from earlier this year!). One may surely hear a touch of Messiaen's influence, too, in some of the exotic harmonies sung by the upper voices in the opening pages of this song.

5. **Ah, Sun-flower!** – this sets Blake again, this time an entire poem. It is the lower voices who now lead in this song, accompanied by the piano playing simple, bell-like alternating chords. This is rooted in the very 'black note' tonality of D flat mixolydian, an almost major scale given an unusual harmonic flavour by its flattened seventh note.

6. **Adieu! Farewell Earth's bliss** – This, the work's longest movement, sets a poem by Thomas Nashe. The key is B flat minor (relative minor to D flat major), and the main influence appears to be Arvo Pärt – hence its tintinnabulatory harmonies, like so many sustained bell chimes. The tempo direction, 'With a slow tread', instantly suggests the character of this piece. Drama is provided – as Choir 2 sings slow, quasi-chorale harmonies – by Choir 1's off-beat and sometimes sharply accented interjections. Choir 1 'signs off' with the unison phrase 'I am sick, I must die', the choirs then swapping roles with Choir 1 now singing the chorale

like harmonies with interjections from Choir 2 singing the second verse. Choir 2 eventually 'sign off', and again the choirs swap roles, Choir 1 now singing the final verse against Choir 2's chorale.

7. Ring out, wild bells – A sudden change of key from the previous movement instantly suggests a change of mood. The chorus intones the Blake Invocation from the opening movement, and the music soon livens up for a setting of text taken from Alfred Lord Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, the text declaiming 'ring out' – on a literal level, the sound of the 'wild bells', but also in the sense of the bells 'chasing out' the ills of mankind. There's a brief hiatus as the chorus mutters in unison 'And let him die'; then the piano resumes, now strongly suggesting the changes familiar to church bell ringers (the concept being that no one cycle of bell-ringing should exactly duplicate another, any duplication being considered 'false'); the chorus soon join in with archetypal church chimes of their own. The final sentiment is that the bells should 'Ring in the thousand years of peace' – a prayer which appears all the more pertinent today.

MARK WILDE – DIRECTOR

www.markwilde.co.uk • @proudsongster



Mark Wilde is a Scottish-born singer, conductor and pedagogue. Mark was a chorister at Dundee Cathedral before studying at the University of East Anglia and the Royal College of Music.

Mark is delighted to have been invited back to work with the Thomas Tallis Society Choir this evening, having last directed the choir in October 2019. He is particularly delighted to do so with his dear friend and colleague David Owen Norris, with whom Mark performs and records regularly. Mark is director of Lincoln Choral Society, The Lincoln

Chorale, and was recently appointed as Director of Music at Grimsby Minster where he is rolling out the exciting Humber Choral Strategy in Grimsby schools. He has appeared as guest conductor for a number of other choirs including the University of Warwick Chorus and the University of Lincoln Choir.

As a performer, Mark's engagements have seen him perform worldwide. Operatic engagements included many roles for the late Sir Graham Vick's Birmingham Opera Company, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Teatro Municipale Reggio Emilia and the Teatro Petruzzelli, Bari, roles for Garsington Opera, Opera North, English National Opera, Australia's Pinchgut Opera, Glyndebourne Festival and Touring Opera, and the Netherlands Opera. He has established a particularly close relationship with English Touring Opera, most notably singing the role of Johnny Inkslinger in their production of *Paul Bunyan* in the season in which ETO won the Opera category in the Olivier Awards.

His recordings include Britten's *Complete Scottish Songs*, Handel *Ode for St Cecilia's Day* (Naxos), Many recordings with the label Opera Rara, *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (Opus Arte Blu Ray / DVD), *Elgar Songs* (Avie), Haydn *Nelson Mass* and *Paukenmesse* (RPO CD), Stainer *The Crucifixion* (Herald CD), Sullivan *The Golden Legend* and *The Prodigal Son* (Hyperion), and *Fame's Great Trumpet – Songs by Britten and Norris* and *Songs & Sonnets* (Songs by Battison Haynes, Parry and Sterndale Bennett) (EM Records).

Mark's recording as Monsieur in Sir Malcolm Arnold's *The Dancing Master* with the BBC Concert Orchestra for Resonus Classics conducted by John Andrews was chosen by BBC Music Magazine as "Best Opera Recording of 2020," while his latest recording as Moore of Moore Hall in Lampe's *The Dragon of Wantley*, again for Resonus Classics, with John Andrews conducting the Brook Street Band was selected as Editor's Choice by Gramophone, BBC Music Magazine, and Presto Music; and a CD of the Week by The Observer.

Mark Wilde is a Professor of Singing at London's Royal Academy of Music and a Trustee of Waterperry Opera Festival.

DAVID OWEN NORRIS – PIANO



David Owen Norris is a pianist, composer and broadcaster. He won the Prize of the City of Geneva in the Geneva Competition, and the Accompanist's Prize at Leeds; and since his appointment to the prestigious Gilmore Artist Award (a direct result of his controversial performances in the Sydney Piano Competition), has performed all across the world, with four appearances in the BBC Proms, concert tours of Europe, Australia and North America, including performances at Sydney Opera House, the Kennedy Centre, Lincoln Centre, Ravinia Festival Chicago, the South Bank Centre etc and a discography of 60 commercial CDs including his own Piano Concerto with the BBC Concert Orchestra, and his oratorio *Prayerbook*. His other compositions include a Symphony, a Piano Sonata, the oratorio *Turning Points*, and the multi-media tribute to the passing seasons, *HengeMusic*.

His *Chord of the Week* programmes on BBC2 television were a popular feature of the Proms for six years. His *Perfect Pianists* is often shown on BBC4. He has contributed to programmes on Parry, Vaughan Williams, Mendelssohn and Elgar, including ninety minutes on BBC2 dedicated to Elgar's Piano Concerto, with a full, filmed performance with the BBCSO. His first TV presentation, *The Real Thing?* from 1990, was hailed by the *Daily Telegraph* as 'the most literate and probing programme on music for many years'. The Beethoven 9 app for which he wrote the book and the analyses won the Best Music App Award.

His many radio presentations have included the *Playlist* series on Radio 4, and *In Tune* and *The Works* on Radio 3, where he recently made his 32nd appearance on *Building a Library*. Recordings recently released include Mozart on fortepiano for Hyperion, the complete Chamber Music of Grace Williams, which was a *Guardian* CD of the Week, and the complete songs of Sir Arthur Sullivan on Chandos.

THOMAS TALLIS SOCIETY CHOIR

The Thomas Tallis Society, now in its 57th year, takes its name from the 16th century composer who worked in the Royal Court in Greenwich and is buried in the crypt of the Parish Church of St Alfege. The choir was founded by Philip Simms, who was organist and choirmaster at the church from 1964 to 2000, and our links with the church continue to the present.

Philip was succeeded by Stephen Dagg, Director of the Centre for Young Musicians at Morley College, London and organist at St Alfege Church, in 2006. During our 50th anniversary year in 2015-16 we were delighted to appoint Eamonn Dougan as our new Musical Director.

With around 60 auditioned voices TTS presents four or five concerts a year in the beautiful setting of St Alfege Church. Although many of the choir members live locally in Greenwich, TTS attracts musicians from all over London owing to the high standards it maintains. All singers are required to have very good sight-reading abilities as the choir works on a few concentrated rehearsals before each concert.

We are always keen to recruit new voices. If you are interested, please contact our membership secretary Kathryn Strachan strac157@ntlworld.com.

Follow us on Twitter: @TTSoc. Look out for updates on [facebook.com/ThomasTallisSociety](https://www.facebook.com/ThomasTallisSociety) and www.thomas-tallis-society.org.uk.

Sopranos Megan Armson, Eleanor Caine, Phoebe Clapham, Julia Corfe-Press, Pippa Jackson, Philippa Kent, Caroline Molloy, Rosemary Naylor, Jill Pollock, Naomi Quant, Anne Whyte, **Emma Wilkins**

Altos Thomas Bridges, Susan Dean, Sian Evans, Bryony Ford, Sally Hughes, Emma Humphries, Emily John, Sonia Johnson, Sophy Miles, Alice Shelton

Tenors Andrew Green, Larry Howes, David Lowick, Paul Renney, Joe Timmons, Graham Voke

Basses Rick Brooks, Cyril Cleary, Quentin Evans, Simon Gallie, Daniel Jaffé, Jonathan Louth, Antonio Oliveira, Nigel Press, John Sutton, Geoff Woodhouse

Bold denotes TTS Ambassadors

FRIENDS AND PATRONS

We are very grateful to our faithful group of Patrons and Friends that have been loyally supporting us for a number of years, especially throughout the pandemic. Their generosity and support have really helped the Society to keep going. A reliable yearly income is a huge benefit in planning programmes and means we can budget more accurately.

We are very keen to increase the number of Patrons and Friends to help us go forward in a sustainable manner and we would love your support as either a Patron or Friend.

A Friend contributes £30 per year and this special relationship with the choir is recognised by:

- A newsletter with early notification of concerts
- An invitation to the annual Friends and Patrons party
- Recognition of support in TTS programmes.

As a Patron of the Society you receive additional benefits in recognition of an annual donation of £150:

- A complimentary top price ticket to all concerts
- Free concert programmes
- Separate interval or pre-concert complimentary drinks table
- Acknowledgment of support of the Society in the programme
- An invitation to the annual Friends and Patrons party.

Please consider whether you could support TTS by becoming a Patron or a Friend of the Society. Speak to Carole tonight or contact her at carolelowe@rocketmail.com.

We would like to recognise the important contribution of the following TTS Patrons:

Mrs Daphne Barnett	Mr Robert John	Mr David Quarmby
Mrs Ursula Bowyer	Dr Thomas Kelen	Mr Robert Ridyard
Ms Rosemary Burch	Mr Peter Kinnison	Dr C and Mrs S Robinson
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Dr Alec Fitzgerald O'Connor	Dr Mary-Clare Parker	Mrs Bee Twidale
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Mr David Grindley	Mr Adam Pollock	Mr Allan Watkins
Revd and Mrs M Hatcher	Mr Nigel Press	Mr Richard Williams
Dr and Mrs E Hurst	Mrs Julia Press	Mrs Virginia Williams

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Mrs Faith Clarke	Ms Alison Leggatt	Mr and Mrs A Seymour
Ms Sophie Cox	Mrs Leilia McKee	Dr T C Stokes
Dr C P Hanson-Abbott	Mrs Carol Price	
Mr Richard Haydon	Mr Roger Price	

REMEMBRANCE DAY CONCERT

Saturday 12 November 2022

James MacMillan: All the hills and vales along
Plus works by Kerensa Briggs,
Bernard Hughes and Cecilia McDowall

Thomas Tallis Society Choir with Regent Brass
conducted by Eamonn Dougan

With thanks to the Churchwardens of St Alfege for their continued support.