



Tonight's Programme

Songs & Sonnets - Shearing

Come woeful Orpheus - Byrd
This sweet and merry month - Byrd

Before me, careless lying - Howells

Three piano pieces:
To a wild rose - MacDowell

Blue Rose - Dickinson
Wild Rose Rag - Dickinson

In youth is pleasure - Howells

Turn our captivity, O Lord - Byrd
Ave verum corpus - Byrd

A Little Jazz Mass - Bob Chilcott

With readings by Ian Lindsay and Frances Shaw

The concert will run without an interval. Drinks will be served in the church hall after the concert. Please join us there.

REMAINING TTS CONCERT DATES & PROGRAMMES in 2023

Saturday 11 November, 7.30pm

Tallis Spem in alium & Celebration of 400th anniversary of the death of William Byrd

Friday 1 December, 7.30pm

Handel Messiah with baroque orchestra

PROGRAMME NOTES

Songs & Sonnets

George Shearing (1919-2011)

George Shearing was born into a working-class family in Battersea, London, in 1919. Congenitally blind, he started to learn piano at the age of three, and went on to study at a school for the blind in Wimbledon, where he received his only formal musical education. Following this he turned down various university scholarships, instead performing 'for 25 bob a week' on piano and accordion at the Mason's Arms in Lambeth, and began to embark on a recording career.

In 1947 Shearing moved to America, where his harmonically complex style mixing swing, bop and modern classical influences gained popularity. He established his reputation permanently in the States when he began to appear at Birdland, the legendary jazz spot in New York. His distinctive style led to a long and illustrious career in jazz through the twentieth century, performing with many of the great names including Count Basie, Dave Brubeck and Nat King Cole.

During the 1950s and 1960s occasional appearances with concert orchestras awoke an interest in classical music, and his solos often drew on the music of Satie, Delius, and Debussy for inspiration.

In 1985 a growing interest in choral music found expression in *Music to Hear*, a commission from the Dale Warland Singers, based in St Paul, Minnesota. Shearing chose to set three texts by Shakespeare for chorus, jazz piano and double bass. This being well-received, fourteen years later another commission (this time from the Mostly Madrigal Singers based in St Charles, Illinois), resulted in a similar collection for the same forces entitled *Songs and Sonnets*, which the composer considered reflected "my English musical background and my American Jazz Influence". It was first performed in 1999 with Shearing at the piano and guest-conducted by John Rutter, the two composers having developed a close friendship.

1. Live with me and be my love (from *Sonnets to Sundry Notes of Music*)
2. When Daffodils begin to peer (*The Winter's Tale*, act IV, scene 2)
3. It was a lover and his lass (*As You Like It*, act V, scene 3)
4. Spring (*Love's Labour's Lost*, act V, scene 2)
5. Who is Silvia? (*Two Gentlemen of Verona*, act IV, scene 2)
6. Fie on sinful fantasy (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, act V, scene 5)
7. Hey, ho, the wind and the rain (*Twelfth Night*, act V, scene 1)

Come woeful Orpheus; This sweet and merry month

William Byrd (1543-1623)

This year marks the 400th anniversary of the death of one of England's finest composers. Almost 600 of Byrd's pieces have survived: church music with Latin texts; church music with English texts; partsongs and madrigals; consort songs; instrumental ensemble music; and keyboard music. In our programme tonight we present two secular pieces from the publication of 1611 *Psalmes, Songs and Sonnets*.

The first is the partsong *Come Woeful Orpheus*. A partsong uses a secular or non-liturgical sacred text, and is most commonly sung by a SATB choir. This music is usually homophonic, meaning that the highest part carries the melody and the other voices or parts supply the accompanying harmonies. At times these harmonies are decidedly jazzy to our ears as they colour the text in order to complement the meaning: for example, in the lines 'some strange chromatic notes', and 'sourest sharps and uncouth flats'.

The second of Byrd's secular settings tonight is the madrigal: *This Sweet and Merry Month of May*. A madrigal is contrapuntal, meaning that each part will have its own tune, and words, that are not sung in turn but at the same time. In this setting, with the choir divided into six parts, this can make for extremely satisfying, if somewhat demanding, listening.

Before me, careless lying

Herbert Howells (1892-1983)

Howells is best known by church choirs for his sacred works, including settings of the liturgies and larger choral works such as the *Requiem*, *Hymnus Paradisi* and the *Stabat Mater*. Like Byrd though, he also wrote madrigals in the style of the renaissance masters, of which we will perform two this evening.

A relatively early work of Howells, written on Christmas Day 1918, *Before me, careless lying* is a setting of a poem by the poet and biographer Austin Dobson, whose *Collected Poems* was published in 1897. It is dedicated to Howell's friend, the organist Dr R. R. Terry who was Director of Music at Westminster Cathedral at the time and a great proponent for widening awareness and appreciation of early church music. The middle section beginning 'Nay, Child' contains mediaeval sounding harmonies with the outer sections reflecting the madrigal style of the Renaissance period.

To a wild rose (1896)

Edward MacDowell (1860-1908)

Edward Alexander MacDowell was born in New York on the 18 December 1860, the son of a milkman. He travelled with his mother to Paris in 1877, where he gained admission to the Paris Conservatory. He later studied piano and composition at the Hoch'sche Conservatory in Frankfurt. When Franz Liszt visited in 1879 and attended a recital of student compositions, MacDowell presented some of his own compositions along with a transcription of a Liszt symphonic poem. Liszt was impressed and encouraged him to continue in composition.

In 1884, he married Marian Griswold Nevins, who had been one of his piano students. The MacDowells settled first in Frankfurt, then in Wiesbaden. From 1885 to 1888 he devoted himself almost exclusively to composition. Driven in part by financial difficulties, they decided to return to America in the autumn of 1888. They lived in Boston until 1896, when he became professor of music at Columbia University, a position he held until 1904.

To a Wild Rose was originally published in 1896 as the first of a set of piano pieces called *Woodland Sketches*. It has appeared in many arrangements and remains one of his most popular compositions due to its simple, unpretentious lyrical beauty.

Blue Rose (1979); Wild Rose Rag (1985)

Peter Dickinson (1934-2023)

The composer, pianist, author, academic and broadcaster Peter Dickinson, who died in June, almost exactly 3 months ago today, introduced music lovers in Britain to new sounds from America, from ragtime and jazz to the most experimental pieces. He inspired interest in unfamiliar works and was a pioneer in the teaching of jazz and popular music in UK degree courses. He happily mixed more traditional techniques with blues and ragtime. One critic wrote: 'Not many composers are equally at home on Radios 2, 3 and 4'.

Dickinson was ahead of his time. He never forgot an apparent snobbism decades earlier towards jazz that led to BBC Radio 3 refusing to broadcast George Gershwin, whose masterpieces include *Rhapsody in Blue*, with its fusion of jazz and classical music.

He was born in Lytham St Annes, Lancashire. After attending the Leys school in Cambridge, Peter got an organ scholarship to Queens' College at the university. He could have pursued a route into cathedral music, but he decided instead to go to the US. From 1958, he spent three formative years in New York, initially as a graduate student at the Juilliard School. "It changed my life," he later recalled. "The impact of New York was extraordinary. London was dull around 1960. New York was mind-blowing."

Dickinson composed two versions of the piece just performed *To a Wild Rose* by Edward MacDowell – a rag and a blues. We hear both versions tonight.

It is less easy to follow MacDowell's melody in the blues version performed first but it is still there throughout. Since a blue rose, which does not appear in nature, was traditionally associated with the

mystery of the unattainable the piece reaches its climax on Scriabin's mystic chord: C – F sharp – A sharp – E – A – D.

The second version is a classical rag version of *To a Wild Rose*. Along with *Blue Rose*, the blues version above, the two pieces formed the basis of Dickinson's organ work *Blue Rose Variations*, written for Jennifer Bate, who gave the première on 2nd April 1986 at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York. It was later played by David Titterington at the BBC Proms in 2009 to celebrate Dickinson's 75th birthday.

In youth is pleasure

Herbert Howells (1892-1983)

This is an early madrigal by Howells, written in 1915, for five voices. It sets a poem by Robert Wever, about whom little is known except that he was active c.1550. The poem is part of a larger morality play *An Enterlude called Lusty Juventus* which tells the story of a youth trying to reform but being led astray by the devil's son Hypocrisy. In this section we find the youth yearning to catch a glimpse of the woman of his dreams.

Turn our captivity, O Lord; Ave verum corpus

Byrd (1533-1623)

We return to Byrd's more familiar sacred settings, firstly with *Turn our captivity, O Lord*, as before taken from the 1611 *Psalmes, Songs and Sonnets*. The text comes from Psalm 126 and starts as a plaintive cry for God to change the fortunes of the Babylonians: in his choice of text, it is not unreasonable to assume that we hear a reflection on Byrd's desire to see a change in the fortunes of England's Catholics.

Ave Verum almost does not need introduction, as it is such a constant in both the Catholic and Anglican traditions today. At the time it was written, however, celebrating the feast of Corpus Christi had recently been outlawed in the Reformation and this work was to be sung, at great personal risk, by underground practicing Catholics in clandestine services held in private houses.

A Little Jazz Mass

Bob Chilcott (b.1955)

Bob Chilcott is a name synonymous with choral music around the world – his musical journey began with singing first as a boy chorister and then as a choral scholar at King's College, then a singing career with the King's Singers, through to directing choirs and working with singers in every corner of the globe, and now concentrating full time on composing. It would be hard to find a choral singer that has not sung something by Chilcott.

A Little Jazz Mass was originally written for upper voices only and was first performed in that format in New Orleans in June 2004. Now more frequently performed in this setting for both upper and lower voices it shows Chilcott's influences from the artists he had the opportunity to perform with through his working life including George Shearing, Richard Rodney Bennett, John Dankworth and Art Farmer. The setting includes the movements of the Mass now commonly sung and excludes the Credo. The Kyrie and Gloria bounce along before a slightly gentler tone is set for the Sanctus and Benedictus. The Agnus Dei changes mood again to a Blues feel with a climactic 'Dona nobis pacem' at the end.

Programme notes by Richard Brooks and Naomi Quant.

EAMONN DOUGAN



Eamonn Dougan is an inspirational conductor and renowned vocal coach and baritone. He is Associate Conductor of The Sixteen, founding Director of Britten Sinfonia Voices, Music Director of the Thomas Tallis Society, and Chief Conductor for Jersey Chamber Orchestra and Ryedale Festival Opera.

Recent conducting debuts include Handel's *Semele* at Sibelius Summer Academy and Haydn's *Seven Last Words of our Saviour on the Cross* with the English National Opera. Forthcoming conducting engagements include performances as part of the Royal Academy of Music's Bach the European series, concerts with

Chorwerk Ruhr, celebrating Byrd's 400th anniversary, a Christmas tour with Ars Nova, Copenhagen and Messiah with Chamber Choir Ireland and the Seville Baroque Orchestra. His third recording with De Profundis will be released in 2024.

Eamonn is vocal consultant for the ongoing Bach series at the Royal Academy of Music, where he also gives conducting masterclasses. He is a Visiting Professor to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London, where he teaches ensemble singing and directs the Guildhall Consort. Eamonn read music at New College, Oxford, before continuing his vocal and conducting studies at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Eamonn Dougan is managed worldwide by Percius. www.percius.co.uk.

PAUL PLUMMER – PIANO



Paul Plummer was organ scholar at New College, Oxford and studied piano accompaniment at the Guildhall, Britten-Pears Young Artists and Tanglewood Music Centre (USA) with Andrew Ball, Malcolm Martineau, Roger Vignoles and Margo Garrett, among others. He has accompanied song recitals at many major UK festivals, at the Wigmore Hall, on Radio 3 and at the Tonhalle in Zürich. His Covid-Lockdown recitals with the collective Proud Songsters are available to view on YouTube, and he is the pianist on the CDs *Love's Voice* (English song with the tenor Nathan Vale) and *Die Schöne Müllerin* (with baritone Jamie W. Hall).

Between 2008 and 2012 Paul worked full-time for the opera companies of Kiel and Innsbruck - as Head of Music Staff (Studienleiter) at the Tiroler Landestheatre in Innsbruck, whose General Director was Ks. Brigitte Fassbaender. He has since worked freelance for Cologne and Wiesbaden as a pianist, vocal coach and assistant conductor (*Die Gezeichneten*, *Schreker*, *From the House of the Dead*, *Janacek*, *Oryx & Crake*, *Eichberg*, *Il Trittico*, *Puccini*); he is also the Head of Music for London's Regents Opera (currently mounting a Ring Cycle at Freemasons' Hall), and Chorus Master for the Buxton Festival.

Paul is highly in demand as a vocal coach of professional singers, and has worked for the Jette Parker Young Artists at Covent Garden, the Academy of Polish National Opera in Warsaw, and Music Academy International's Trentino Music Festival (of which he is a faculty member).

THOMAS TALLIS SOCIETY CHOIR

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.

Sopranos Imogen Faris, Jan Hart, Pippa Jackson, Claire Jones, Philippa Kent, Jill Pollock, Naomi Quant, Bethan Rose, Anne Whyte, **Emma Wilkins**

Altos Joanna Clark, Susan Dean, Bryony Ford, Sally Hughes, Emma Humphries, Philippa John, Catriona May, Alice Shelton, Ruthie Smith, Anna Townsend

Tenors David Abrahams, Justin Eeles, Andrew Green, Larry Howes, Andrew Lang, David Lowick, Adam Oliver, Paul Renney

Basses Dermot Agnew, Richard Brooks, Cyril Cleary, Simon Gallie, Stephen Jackson, Jonathan Louth, David McNally, Antonio Oliveira, John Sutton

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And look out for updates on our website www.thomas-tallis-society.org.uk.

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We are very grateful to our faithful group of Patrons and Friends that have been loyally supporting us for a number of years. 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:

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