

This concert is in memory of Sybil Spence, whose family joked that Wigmore Hall was her second home

Divine Music

Iestyn Davies countertenor
Joseph Middleton piano

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)
William Croft (1678-1727)

Canticle I: My beloved is mine Op. 40 (1947)
A Hymn on Divine Musick (pub. 1714) *realised by Benjamin Britten*

Thomas Adès (b.1971)
John Dowland (1563-1626)
Helen Grime (b.1981)
Gerald Finzi (1901-1956)

Darknesse visible (1992)
In darkness let me dwell (pub. 1610)
Harp of the North (2004)
Let us garlands bring Op. 18 (1929-42)
Come away, come away, death • Who is Sylvia? • Fear no more the heat o' the sun • O mistress mine • It was a lover and his lass

Interval

Cheryl Frances-Hoad (b.1980)
Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Star Falling (2002)
I'll sail upon the dog-star from *A Fool's Preferment* Z571 (1688) *realised by Benjamin Britten*

Nico Muhly (b.1981)

New-Made Tongue (2020)
Falling Berceuse (2020)

George Butterworth (1885-1916)

6 Songs from *A Shropshire Lad* (1911)
Loveliest of trees • When I was one-and-twenty • Look not in my eyes • Think no more, lad • The lads in their hundreds • Is my team ploughing?

Benjamin Britten
Nico Muhly

Night Piece (Notturmo) (1963)
From *4 Traditional Songs* (2011)

Henry Purcell

A brisk young lad • The bitter withy
Now that the sun hath veiled his light (An Evening Hymn on a Ground) Z193 (pub. 1688) *arranged by Thomas Adès*

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The 18th Century composer **Croft** asked of music, 'What art thou? From what causes dost thou spring?'. The answer, in the appropriately beautiful 'A Hymn on Divine Musick', is ultimately 'Heav'n' – or, perhaps, Heav'n itself is music. This programme of exquisitely crafted vocal and solo piano works appears to channel the Divine in both senses: celestially inspired, and simply 'divine'. The 'causes' from which music 'dost spring' are varied: from the night skies, to isolation, to love, and frequently to the powerful effect of the past. **Britten's** 'Canticle I: My beloved is mine' is a case in point. The tradition of English song is often characterised as 'restrained', with (as Stephen Banfield has suggested) the emotional heavy lifting carried by the piano while the voice holds back. In 'Canticle I', conversely, Britten draws on the vocal style of his predecessors (including Croft, whose 'Hymn' he sensitively arranged), and liberates the voice – while at the same time seeming to appeal for personal liberation. Written for Peter Pears in 1947, it seems almost outrageously bold in its refrain 'I my best beloved's am, so he is mine': virtuosic in the first section, playful in the middle, transcendent by the end.

Thomas Adès's *Darknesse visible* for piano springs from a vocal source – 'In darkness let me dwell,' by **Dowland**. As Adès wrote, it is an 'explosion' rather than an arrangement of the song, with elements of the original reconfigured and flung to the far reaches of the keyboard. The distinctive Dowland melancholy is given a shivery, haunting quality by the persistent 'tremolando' throughout. Hearing the original song directly afterwards has the effect of atmospheric mists dissipating to reveal a clear, crisp picture. **Helen Grime's** *Harp of the North* similarly revolves around a lyrical theme, its opening and closing sections bringing the melody in and out of focus, surrounded by what Grime calls 'filigree' material.

Finzi's *Let us garlands bring* draws on multiple musical strands across time. It is dedicated to Vaughan Williams, is broadly tonal yet with some disconcertingly harsh dissonance, and also nods to Renaissance lute songs. 'Come away, death' and 'O mistress mine' have a 17th Century flavour – grave and melancholy in the former, sprightly and tonal in the latter. Syncopations and unexpected bar-lengths colour the questioning 'Who is Sylvia?' while one of Finzi's favourite pulsing rhythms dominates the outrageously good-natured 'It was a lover and his lass.' The centre-piece is the famous 'Fear no more the heat o' the sun', a song of extraordinary beauty constructed via the simplest of means. The vocal line, increasingly expressive, rises and falls over the gentle, solemn trudge of the piano.

In the second half, the lights go down, and we enter nocturnal territory. **Cheryl Frances-Hoad's** short, sweet, *Star Falling* was written – in a mere few hours – in response to Else Lasker-Schüler's poem *Reconciliation*. Its 'falling stars' are, perhaps, the shards of octaves in the pianist's right hand drifting down towards the sumptuous chords below. More stars feature in **Purcell's** 'I'll sail upon the dog-star,' realized by Britten in 1943.

The 'dog-star' is Sirius, the brightest star in the sky, and Britten subjects Purcell's song to a suitably bright treatment.

Nico Muhly's 'New-Made Tongue' and *Falling Berceuse* were created in the strange, twilight world of COVID. The first is from *Eight Songs from Isolation*, a group of songs by different composers filmed and recorded in 'isolated' lockdown. It is a wistful setting of a text by Thomas Traherne; in the filmed version of *Eight Songs* Iestyn Davies, hand pressed to the window of his home, gazes out into the world, gratefully witnessing the 'brighter regions which salute my eyes'. *Falling Berceuse* was composed for pianist and cellist Leo Popplewell, contributing to his lockdown project of short piano pieces. Rather like the 'shards' in *Star Falling*, the upper registers of the piano sparkle over an atmospheric bed of lower notes.

Butterworth's *6 Songs from A Shropshire Lad* comprise an atmosphere of gathering pathos, building towards the beloved setting of 'Is my team ploughing?'. The first five, all brief, travel through the warmly blossoming opening, through the folkish 'When I was one-and-twenty' and gently off-beat 'Look not in my eyes'. The second half of the cycle includes the defiant 'Think no more, lad' and delicate, economical 'The lads in their hundreds,' its lightness speaking, poignantly, to those who 'will never grow old.' In the finale the voice beyond the grave is devastating in its calm resignation.

A rare piano piece by Britten follows: *Night Piece (Notturmo)*, composed in 1963 and belonging to his 'night pieces' from the early 1960s (a remarkable group which included *Nocturne* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). The piece could be said to resemble the progress through night of a restless sleeper – from peaceful dreaming, to REM in the fluttery repeated notes, to a somewhat ambivalent close.

Muhly composed his *4 Traditional Songs* especially for Iestyn Davies and in response to the unaccompanied singing of Davies's eminent countertenor predecessor Alfred Deller. Muhly challenged himself, in 'The bitter withy', to create a 'barely-there' accompaniment: the piano arrives, unobtrusively, around halfway through and maintains a discreet presence, only occasionally accenting the words. Muhly described 'A brisk young lad' as one of the saddest folk songs in the catalogue. His empathic response to the young woman's plight is evident in the lonely, sparse piano lines beneath the text.

Adès's version of Purcell's 'Now that the sun hath veiled his light' begins with a similarly laconic accompaniment, a simple 'walking bass' in the left hand. The meditative vocal line, with its revolving, repeated 'Alleluia' at the end, is subtly disrupted at times with rhythmic displacements in the piano, but largely the atmosphere is one of serene contentment. Divine Musick indeed.

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Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Canticle I: My beloved is mine Op. 40 (1947)

Francis Quarles

Ev'n like two little bank-divided brooks
That wash the pebbles with their wanton streams.
And having ranged and searched a thousand nooks
Meet both at length at silver breasted Thames
Where in a greater current they conjoin.
So I my best beloved's am.
So he is mine!

Ev'n so we met and after long pursuit
Ev'n so we joined. We both became entire.
No need for either to renew a suit
For I was flax, and he was flames of fire.
Our firm united souls did more than twine.
So I my best beloved's am.
So he is mine!

If all those glittering monarchs, that command
The servile quarters of this earthly ball
Should tender in exchange their shares of land
I would not change my fortunes for them all;
Their wealth is but a counter to my coin;
The world's but theirs;
But my beloved's mine.

Nor time, nor place, nor chance, nor death
Can bow my least desires unto the least remove.
He's firmly mine by oath, I his by vow.
He's mine by faith and I am his by love.
He's mine by water, I am his by wine;
Thus I my best beloved's am.
Thus he is mine.

He is my altar, I his holy place,
I am his guest and he my living food.
I'm his by penitence, he mine by grace.
I'm his by purchase, he is mine by blood.
He's my supporting elm and I his vine;
Thus I my best beloved's am.
Thus he is mine.

He gives me wealth: I give him all my vows;
I give him songs, he gives me length of days.
With wreaths of grace he crowns my longing brows
And I his temples with a crown of praise
Which he accepts: an everlasting sign
That I my best beloved's am.
That he is mine.

William Croft (1678-1727)

A Hymn on Divine Musick (pub. 1714)

realised by Benjamin Britten

Anonymous

What art thou? From what causes dost thou spring?
Oh! Musick thou Divine Misterious thing?
Let me, let me but know, and knowing give me Voice
to sing?
Art thou the warmth in Spring, that Zephire
breathes?
Painting the Meads, and whistling through the
leaves.
The happy, happy Season that all grief exiles,
When God is Pleas'd and the Creation Smiles?
Or art thou Love, that mind to mind imparts,
The endless concord of agreeing hearts?
Or art thou Friendship, yet a nobler Flame,
That can a dearer way make Souls the same?
Or art thou rather which do all transcend,
The Centre which at last the Blest ascend,
The seat where Hallelujahs never end;
Corporeal Eyes won't let us clearly see,
But either thou art Heav'n, or Heav'n is thee.

Thomas Adès (b.1971)

Darknesse visible (1992)

John Dowland (1563-1626)

In darkness let me dwell (pub. 1610)

Anonymous

In darkness let me dwell, the ground shall sorrow be,
The roof despair to bar all cheerful light from me,
The walls of marble black that moist'ned still shall
weep,
My music hellish jarring sounds to banish friendly
sleep.
Thus wedded to my woes and bedded to my tomb
O, let me living die, till death do come.

Helen Grime (b.1981)

Harp of the North (2004)

Please do not turn the page until the song and its accompaniment have ended.

Gerald Finzi (1901-1956)

Let us garlands bring Op. 18 (1929-42)

William Shakespeare

Come away, come away, death

Come away, come away, death
And in sad cypress let me be laid;
Fly away, fly away, breath;
I am slain by a fair cruel maid.

My shroud of white, stuck all with yew,
O prepare it!
My part of death, no one so true
Did share it.

Not a flower, not a flower sweet,
On my black coffin let there be strown;
Not a friend, not a friend greet
My poor corpse, where my bones shall be thrown:

A thousand, thousand sighs to save,
Lay me, O where
Sad true lover never find my grave,
To weep there!

Who is Sylvia?

Who is Silvia? what is she,
That all our swains commend her?
Holy, fair and wise is she;
The heavens such grace did lend her,
That she might admirèd be.

Is she kind as she is fair?
For beauty lives with kindness.
Love doth to her eyes repair,
To help him of his blindness,
And being helped, inhabits there.

Then to Silvia let us sing,
That Silvia is excelling;
She excels each mortal thing
Upon the dull earth dwelling;
To her let us garlands bring.

Fear no more the heat o' the sun

Fear no more the heat o' the sun,
Nor the furious winter's rages;
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages:
Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

Fear no more the frown o' the great;
Thou art past the tyrant's stroke;
Care no more to clothe and eat;
To thee the reed is as the oak:
The sceptre, learning, physic, must
All follow this, and come to dust.

Fear no more the lightning flash,
Nor the all-dreaded thunder-stone;
Fear not slander, censure rash;
Thou hast finish'd joy and moan:
All lovers young, all lovers must
Consign to thee, and come to dust.

No exorciser harm thee!
Nor no witchcraft charm thee!
Ghost unlaid forbear thee!
Nothing ill come near thee!
Quiet consummation have;
And renownèd be thy grave!

O mistress mine

O mistress mine, where are you roaming?
O stay and hear, your true love's coming
That can sing both high and low.

Trip no further, pretty sweeting;
Journeys end in lovers' meeting,
Ev'ry wise man's son doth know.

What is love? 'Tis not hereafter;
Present mirth hath present laughter;
What's to come is still unsure:

In delay there lies no plenty;
Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty;
Youth's a stuff will not endure.

It was a lover and his lass

It was a lover and his lass,
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino
That o'er the green corn-field did pass.
In the spring time, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding a ding;
Sweet lovers love the spring.

Between the acres of the rye,
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino,
These pretty country folks would lie,
In the spring time ...

This carol they began that hour,
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino,
How that a life was but a flower

In the spring time ...

And therefore take the present time
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino,
For love is crownèd with the prime
In the spring time ...

Interval

Cheryl Frances-Hoad (b.1980)

Star Falling (2002)

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

I'll sail upon the dog-star (1688) from *A Fool's Preferment Z571* (1688)

*realised by Benjamin Britten
Thomas D'Urfey*

I'll sail upon the dog-star,
And then pursue the morning,
I'll chase the moon till it be noon,
But I'll make her leave her horning.

I'll climb the frosty mountain,
And there I'll coin the weather;
I'll tear the rainbow from the sky,
And tie both ends together.

The stars pluck from their orbs, too,
And crowd them in my budget;
And whether I'm a roaming boy,
Let all the nations judge it.

Nico Muhly (b.1981)

New-Made Tongue (2020)

Thomas Traherne

These little Limbs,
These eyes and hands where here I find,
This panting Heart with which my Life begins;
Where have ye been? Behind
What curtain were ye from me hid so long!

Where was, in what Abyss, my new-made Tongue?

When silent I
So many thousand thousand Years
Beneath the Dust did in a Chaos lie,
How could I Smiles, or Tears,
Or Lips, or Hands, or Eyes, or Ears perceive?

I that so long
Was nothing from Eternity,
Did little think such joys as Ear and Tongue
To celebrate or see:
Such sounds to hear, such Hands to feel, such Feet,
Such Eyes and Objects on the Ground to meet.

New burnished Joys!
Which finest Gold and Pearl excel!
Such sacred Treasures are the Limbs of Boys
In which a Soul doth dwell;
Their organized Joints and azure Veins
More Wealth include than the dead World contains.

From dust I rise
And out of Nothing now awake;
These brighter Regions which salute mine Eyes
A Gift from God I take:
The Earth, the Seas, the Light, the lofty Skies,
The Sun and Stars are mine; if these I prize.

Falling Berceuse (2020)

George Butterworth (1885-1916)

6 Songs from *A Shropshire Lad* (1911)

AE Housman

Loveliest of trees

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bough,
And stands about the woodland ride
Wearing white for Eastertide.

Now, of my threescore years and ten,
Twenty will not come again.
And take from seventy springs a score,
It only leaves me fifty more.

Song continues overleaf. Please turn the page as quietly as possible

And since to look at things in bloom
Fifty springs are little room,
About the woodlands I will go
To see the cherry hung with snow.

When I was one-and-twenty

When I was one-and-twenty
I heard a wise man say,
'Give crowns and pounds and guineas
But not your heart away;
Give pearls away and rubies
But keep your fancy free.'
But I was one-and-twenty,
No use to talk to me.

When I was one-and-twenty
I heard him say again,
'The heart out of the bosom
Was never given in vain;
'Tis paid with sighs a plenty
And sold for endless rue.'
And I am two-and-twenty,
And oh, 'tis true, 'tis true.

Look not in my eyes

Look not in my eyes, for fear
They mirror the sight I see,
And there you find your face too clear
And love it and be lost like me.
One the long nights through must lie
Spent in star-defeated sighs,
But why should you as well as I
Perish? Gaze not in my eyes.

A Grecian lad, as I hear tell,
One that many loved in vain,
Looked into a forest well
And never looked away again.
There, where the turf in springtime flowers,
With downward eye and gazes sad,
Stands amid the glancing showers
A jonquil, not a Grecian lad.

Think no more, lad

Think no more, lad; laugh, be jolly:
Why should men make haste to die?
Empty heads and tongues a-talking
Make the rough road easy walking,
And the feather pate of folly
Bears the falling sky.

Oh, 'tis jesting, dancing, drinking
Spins the heavy world around.
If young hearts were not so clever,
Oh, they would be young for ever:
Think no more; 'tis only thinking
Lays lads underground.

The lads in their hundreds

The lads in their hundreds to Ludlow come in for the
fair,
There's men from the barn and the forge and the mill
and the fold,
The lads for the girls and the lads for the liquor are
there,
And there with the rest are the lads that will never be
old.

There's chaps from the town and the field and the till
and the cart,
And many to count are the stalwart, and many the
brave,
And many the handsome of face and the handsome
of heart,
And few that will carry their looks or their truth to the
grave.

I wish I could know them, I wish there were tokens to
tell
The fortunate fellows that now you can never
discern;
And then one could talk with them friendly and wish
them farewell
And watch them depart on the way that they will not
return.

But now you may stare as you like and there's
nothing to scan;
And brushing your elbow unguessed-at and not to
be told
They carry back bright to the coiner the mintage of
man,
The lads that will die in their glory and never be old.

Is my team ploughing?

'Is my team ploughing,
That I used to drive
And hear the harness jingle
When I was man alive?'

Ay, the horses trample,
The harness jingles now;
No change though you lie under
The land you used to plough.

'Is football playing
Along the river shore,
With lads to chase the leather,
Now I stand up no more?'

Ay, the ball is flying,
The lads play heart and soul;
The goal stands up, the keeper
Stands up to keep the goal.

'Is my girl happy,
That I thought hard to leave,
And has she tired of weeping
As she lies down at eve?'

Ay, she lies down lightly,
She lies not down to weep:
Your girl is well contented.
Be still, my lad, and sleep.

'Is my friend hearty,
Now I am thin and pine,
And has he found to sleep in
A better bed than mine?'

Yes, lad, I lie easy,
I lie as lads would choose;
I cheer a dead man's sweetheart,
Never ask me whose.

Benjamin Britten

Night Piece (Notturmo) (1963)

Nico Muhly

From 4 Traditional Songs (2011)

Traditional

A brisk young lad (2011)

A brisk young lad, he courted me,
He stole away my liberty,
He stole my heart with a free good-will,
He has it now and he'll keep it still.

There is a flow'r I've heard them say,
Would ease my heart both night and day,
I would to God that flow'r I could find
That would ease my heart and my troubling mind.

Dig me a grave both wide and deep,
Set marble stones at my head and feet,
And a turtle white dove carve over above

To let the world know that I died of love.

The bitter withy (2011)

As it befell on a bright holiday,
Small hail from the sky did fall,
Our Saviour asked his mother dear
If he might go and play at ball.

At ball, at ball, my own dear Son,
It's time that you were gone,
And don't let me hear of any mischief
At night when you come home.

So up the hill and down the hill
Our sweet young Saviour ran,
Until he met three rich young lords,
'Good morning' to each one.

'Good morn, good morn, good morn' said they,
'Good morning' then said he,
'And which of you three rich young lords
Will play at ball with me?'

'We all are lords' and ladies' sons,
Born in a baron hall,
And you are nothing but a poor maid's child,
Born in an oxen stall.'

Sweet Jesus turned him round about,
He neither laughed nor smiled,
But the tears came trickling from his eyes
Like water from the sky.

Then he made him a bridge from the beams of the
Sun
And over the water ran he,
The rich young lords chased after him
And drown'd they were all three.

Then up the hill and down the hill
Three rich young mothers ran,
Saying 'Mary mild fetch home your child
For drown'd is ours each one.'

So Mary mild fetched home her child
And laid him across her knee
And with a handful of withy twigs,
She gave him slashes three.

'Ah bitter withy, ah bitter withy,
You've causèd me to smart,
And the willow shall be the very first tree
To perish at the heart.'

Please do not turn the page until the song and its accompaniment have ended

Henry Purcell

Now that the sun hath veiled his light (An
Evening Hymn on a Ground) Z193 (pub.
1688)

arranged by Thomas Adès

William Fuller

Now that the sun hath veil'd his light
And bid the world goodnight,
To the soft bed my body I dispose,
But where shall my soul repose?
Dear God, even in thy arms;
And can there be any so sweet security?
Then to thy rest, O my soul, and, singing, praise
The mercy that prolongs thy days! Halleluia.