

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 11 December 2022
3.00pm

How Cold the Wind doth Blow

Mary Bevan soprano • Nicky Spence tenor
William Vann piano • Jack Liebeck violin

Gustav Holst (1874-1934)	Jesu sweet, now will I sing Op. 35 No. 1 (1916-7)
Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979)	3 Old English Songs (1923-4) <i>It was a lover and his lass • Phillis on the new made hay • The tailor and his mouse</i>
Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)	The Seeds of Love (1923) How Cold the Wind Doth Blow, or, The Unquiet Grave (1912)
Gustav Holst	The heart worships (1907)
Thomas Dunhill (1877-1946)	The Cloths of Heaven from <i>The Wind among the Reeds</i> (1911)
John Ireland (1879-1962)	Spleen from <i>Marigold</i> (1913)
Ralph Vaughan Williams	The Sky above the Roof (1908) Dirge for Fidele (1922) It Was a Lover and His Lass (1922)
Rebecca Clarke	A Psalm of David, When He Was in the Wilderness of Judah (Psalm 63) (1920)
Grace Williams (1906-1977)	Slow, Slow, Fresh Fount (c.1925)
Elizabeth Maconchy (1907-1994)	A Hymn to God the Father (1959)
Ina Boyle (1889-1967)	The Last Invocation (1913)
Ralph Vaughan Williams	2 Vocal Duets (1904) <i>The last invocation • The love song of the birds</i> Wassail Song from <i>8 Traditional English Carols</i> (1919)



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Of his time as a pupil, **Vaughan Williams** commented that 'the benefit that one obtains from an academy or college is not so much from one's official teachers as from one's fellow students.' Gustav Holst, **Thomas Dunhill** and John Ireland were among the classmates whom he held in highest regard: Vaughan Williams admired Holst in particular for 'his great human sympathy, his unique humour, his strong sense of values', and the two remained lifelong friends. When he himself began teaching, Vaughan Williams tried to nurture this sense of camaraderie among his students, impressing upon them that they needed to be each other's best friends, advocates and critics. Evidently Vaughan Williams's teaching strategy worked, because while under his tutelage Elizabeth Maconchy, Ina Boyle and Grace Williams established friendships with one another that lasted until their deaths.

Holst and Vaughan Williams met at the Royal College in 1895, bonding over a love of literature. They would later share an enthusiasm for folk music and plainsong hymns, both of which are influences in 'Jesu sweet'. The English folksong revival was surely partly behind his unusual pairing of voice and solo violin, attempting to create a 'folk-like' sound - although the story goes that Holst was inspired to choose this instrumentation after hearing one of his students singing while accompanying herself on her violin. Holst described music as being 'identical with heaven...a condition of eternity', and this sentiment is captured exquisitely in the devotional tone of this simple, reverential hymn.

Rebecca Clarke first met Vaughan Williams while she was studying at the Royal College, after he agreed to conduct a Palestrina choir that she set up with a friend. She was not a committed folksong enthusiast, but the *Old English Songs* provided some artistic rejuvenation after several months away from composing. She was a celebrated violist, and spent much of 1923 on a performance tour of Asia, which left her very little time for writing. These three folksong arrangements were composed shortly after her return to England from late 1923 to early 1924, and she confided to her diary that the process 'simply fascinated one', and it was 'so lovely to have time to breathe again.' She was particularly pleased with these songs, noting that they 'come off very well' in performance. 'The tailor and his mouse' is the most jovial of the three, telling the tale of an unfortunate mouse who meets an untimely end in an apple pie. Clarke's expertise as a string player shines through in all the settings, allowing the violinist their own space to shine while never overpowering the singer.

'A Psalm of David', composed in 1920, inhabits a far more avant-garde sound world. In her day Clarke was recognised as a leading modernist composer, and this song perfectly exemplifies why. Her setting highlights the violence in the words, and she brings an overt theatricality to the text, giving the singer both expansive gestures and

declamatory moments. Clarke's sympathies with European modernism come through clearly in this song, as do **Ireland's** in 'Spleen'. Setting a translation of one of Paul Verlaine's poems, 'Spleen' is dominated by harmonies and textures adopted from French musical Impressionism, all given an English twist.

Many of the texts on today's programme have a theme of grief and mourning. In 'The Sky above the Roof' the singer laments life passing by, while in 'The Unquiet Grave' a man stops his lover's spirit from finding peace because he cannot let her go. Vaughan Williams returned repeatedly to 'The Unquiet Grave', making several settings of this folk song - this one dates from 1912. Shakespeare, the librettist for both the 'Dirge for Fidele' and 'It Was a Lover and his Lass', is also a recurring theme in Vaughan Williams's output. He was first introduced to the playwright as a child, and went on to write not only songs to Shakespeare texts, but incidental music for his plays and an opera based on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. In the context of the play from which the 'Dirge' comes, *Cymbeline*, the text is tragicomic - but by giving it a concert-hall setting, Vaughan Williams removes the comedy completely, making it a tranquil acceptance of death.

Grace Williams's 'Slow, Slow, Fresh Fount' is another song about loss, this time to a text by Ben Jonson in which Echo grieves for Narcissus. Williams sets the words to repeated descending lines, falling like Echo's flowing tears. The sentiment expressed in **Maconchy's** response to John Donne's 'A Hymn to God the Father' is more enigmatic. The singer wonders if God will forgive their sins and the music resolves only in the very final moments, when they 'fear no more'. Maconchy always turned to Williams for feedback and critique on her scores - she thought this song 'a very fine setting'. Walt Whitman's 'The Last Invocation' has proved an enduringly popular text, prompting renditions from a plethora of composers including both Vaughan Williams and **Ina Boyle**. The two interpretations we are hearing today are remarkably different from one another. Boyle has been described as an 'otherworldly' woman who saw 'visions' that she then transcribed into sound - accordingly, her response to Whitman's transcendental poem is meditative and spiritual. Vaughan Williams's setting is more sensual, the voices and violin intertwining with one another, their repeated chant-like passages making the rich, soaring melodic lines at 'Strong is your hold O love' all the more powerful. We close with Vaughan Williams's arrangement of the seventeenth-century 'Wassail' Christmas carol. This was traditionally sung by groups travelling door-to-door exchanging drink for gifts, the cheerful strains of the carol ringing through the night to celebrate the coming of Christmas.

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Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

Jesu sweet, now will I sing Op. 35 No. 1

(1916-7)

Anonymous

Jesu Sweet, now will I sing
To Thee a song of love longing;
Do in my heart a quick well spring
Thee to love above all thing.

Jesu Sweet, my dim heart's gleam
Brighter than the sunnèbeam!
As thou wert born in Bethlehem
Make in me thy lovèdream.

Jesu Sweet, my dark heart's light
Thou art day withouten night;
Give me strength and eke might
For to loven Thee aright.

Jesu Sweet, well may he be
That in Thy bliss Thyself shall see:
With love cords then draw Thou me
That I may come and dwell with Thee.

Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979)

3 Old English Songs (1923-4)

It was a lover and his lass

William Shakespeare

It was a lover and his lass,
With a hey, with a ho, with a hey nonny no,
That o'er the green corn-field did pass.
In spring time, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding a ding;
Sweet lovers love the spring.

This carol they began that hour,
With a hey, with a ho, with a hey nonny no,
How that life was but a flower
In the spring time, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding a ding;
Sweet lovers love the spring.

Then pretty lovers, take the time,
With a hey, with a ho, with a hey nonny no,
For love is crownéd with the prime
In the spring time, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding a ding;
Sweet lovers love the spring.

Phillis on the new made hay

Anonymous

Phillis on the new made hay,
Fair, but lonely still she lay,
Wasting all the summer day
In melancholy sighing;
Till Amintor came that way
And bid her cease repining.

Told her he had loved her long,
Loved her well and loved too long;
Phillis feared he'd do her wrong
And feared to say she loved him;
Till he swore in word and song
She never need reprove him.

He had bought the wedding ring,
Many a bow and silken string,
Fit for queen or fit for king,
To show he truly loved her;
Thus did he declare and sing
Until at last he moved her.

The tailor and his mouse

Anonymous

A tailor had a little mouse
Hi diddly um come feedle
They lived together in one house
Hi diddly um come feedle

Hi diddly um come tarum tantum,
Through the town of Ramsey,
Hi diddly um come over the lea,
Hi diddly um come feedle

The tailor thought his mouse was ill
Hi diddly um come feedle
So he gave it half of one blue pill
Hi diddly um come feedle

Hi diddly um come tarum tantum,
Through the town of Ramsey ...

The tailor thought his mouse would die
Hi diddly um come feedle
So he baked it in an apple pie
Hi diddly um come feedle

Hi diddly um come tarum tantum,
Through the town of Ramsey ...

The tailor thought his mouse was dead
Hi diddly um come feedle
So he got another in his stead
Hi diddly um come feedle

Hi diddly um come tarum tantum,
Through the town of Ramsey ...

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

The Seeds of Love (1923)

Traditional

I sowed the seeds of love,
And I sowed them in the spring:
I gathered them up in the morning so soon
While the small birds so sweetly sing.

My garden was planted well
With flowers everywhere.
But I had not the liberty to choose for myself
Of the flowers that I love so dear.

The gardener was standing by,
And I asked him to choose for me.
He chose for me the violet, the lily and the pink,
But those I refused - all three.

In June there's a red rosebud,
And that is the flower for me.
I often times have plucked that red rosebud
Till I gained the willow tree.

How Cold the Wind Doth Blow, or, The Unquiet Grave (1912)

Traditional

Cold blows the wind to my true love,
And a few drops the rain,
I never had but one true love,
And in greenwood he lies slain,
And in greenwood he lies slain.

I'll do as much for my true love
As any young girl may;
I'll sit and weep down by his grave
Your days they would not be long.
Your days they would not be long.

When twelve month were come and gone,
This young man he arose
'What makes you weep down by my grave,
I can't take my repose?
I can't take my repose?'

'One kiss, one kiss of your white lips
One kiss is all I crave
One kiss of your lips
And return back to your grave
And return back to your grave.'

'My lips they are as cold as clay,
My breath is earthly and strong
And if you were to kiss my lilywhite lips,
Your days would not be long.
Your days would not be long.'

'My time be long, my time be short,
Tomorrow or today,
Sweet Christ in Heaven have all my soul
And take my life away
And take my life away, away.'

Gustav Holst

The heart worships (1907)

Alice M. Buckton

Silence in Heav'n,
Silence on Earth
Silence within!
Thy hush, O Lord,
O'er all the world covers the din.
I do not fear to speak of thee in mortal kind
And yet to all thy namelessness I am not blind.
Only I need and kneel again
Thy touch to win;
Silence in Heav'n
Silence on Earth
Silence within!

Thomas Dunhill (1877-1946)

The Cloths of Heaven from *The Wind among the Reeds* (1911)

WB Yeats

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths
Enwrought with golden and silver light
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half-light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

John Ireland (1879-1962)

Spleen from *Marigold* (1913)

Ernest Dowson, after Paul Verlaine

Around were all the roses red
The ivy all around was black.

Dear, so thou only move thine head,
Shall all mine old despairs awake!

Too blue, too tender was the sky,
The air too soft, too green the sea.

Always I fear, I know not why,
Some lamentable flight from thee.

I am so tired of holly-sprays
And weary of the bright box-tree,

Of all the endless country ways;
Of everything alas! save thee.

Ralph Vaughan Williams

The Sky above the Roof (1908)

Mabel Dearmer, after Paul Verlaine

What hast thou done O heart,
The sky above the roof
Simple and fair
Poured out in tears?
Plaintively sings
Murmurs of strife are here
Why dost thou weep O heart
Lost in the air
Drowsily rings
Bends in the heat
Ah God! A life is here,
A tree above the roof
A bird from out the blue
A bell from out the blue
Is calm and sweet
With thy spent years?

Dirge for Fidele (1922)

William Shakespeare

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 lightning-flash,
Nor the all-dreaded thunder-stone;
Fear not slander, censure rash;
Thou hast finished 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!

It Was a Lover and His Lass (1922)

William Shakespeare

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 spring time, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing, hey ding a-ding a-ding;
Sweet lovers love the spring.

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 spring time, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing, hey ding a-ding a-ding;
Sweet lovers love the spring.

And therefore take the present time
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino,
For love is crownèd with the prime
In spring time, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing, hey ding a-ding a-ding;
Sweet lovers love the spring.

Rebecca Clarke

A Psalm of David, When He Was in the Wilderness of Judah (Psalm 63) (1920)

Liturgical text

O God, thou art my God;
Early will I seek thee:
My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee
In a dry and thirsty land, where no water is;
To see thy power and thy glory,
So as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.
Because thy loving kindness is better than life,
My lips shall praise thee.
Thus will I bless thee while I live:
I will lift up my hands in thy name.
My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and
fatness;
And my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips:
When I remember thee upon my bed,
And meditate on thee in the night watches.
Because thou hast been my help,
Therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.
My soul followeth hard after thee:
Thy right hand upholdeth me.
But those that seek my soul, to destroy it,
Shall go into the lower parts of the earth.
They shall fall by the sword:
They shall be a portion of foxes.
But the king shall rejoice in God;
Every one that sweareth by him shall glory:
But the mouth of them that speak lies shall be
stopped.

Grace Williams (1906-1977)

Slow, Slow, Fresh Fount (c.1925)

Ben Jonson

Slow, slow, fresh fount, keep time with my salt tears;
Yet slower, yet, O faintly, gentle springs;
List, list to the heavy part the music bears,
Woe weeps out her division when she sings.
Droop, droop herbs and flowers;
Fall, fall grief in showers.

Elizabeth Maconchy (1907-1994)

A Hymn to God the Father (1959)

John Donne

Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun,
Which is my sin though it were done before?
Wilt thou forgive those sins, through which I run,
And do run still, though still I do deplore?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For I have more.

Wilt thou forgive that sin by which I've won
Others to sin? And made my sin their door?
Wilt thou forgive that sin which I did shun
A year or two: but wallow'd in, a score?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For I have more.

I have a sin of fear, that when I've spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
Swear by thy self, that at my death thy Son
Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore;
And having done that, thou hast done,
I fear no more.

Ina Boyle (1889-1967)

The Last Invocation (1913)

Walt Whitman

At the last, tenderly,
From the walls of the powerful, fortress'd house,
From the clasp of the knitted locks –
From the keep of the well-closed doors,
Let me be wafted.

Let me glide noiselessly forth;
With a key of softness unlock the locks – with a whisper,
Set ope the doors, O Soul!

Tenderly! be not impatient!
(Strong is thy hold, O mortal flesh!
Strong is thy hold, O Love.)

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

2 Vocal Duets (1904)

Walt Whitman

The last invocation

At the last, tenderly,
From the walls of the powerful, fortress'd house,
From the clasp of the knitted locks,
From the keep of the well closed doors,
Let me be wafted.

Let me glide noiselessly forth;
With the key of softness unlock the locks, with a whisper,
Set ope the doors, O Soul!

Tenderly! be not impatient!
Strong is your hold, O mortal flesh!
Strong is your hold, O Love.

The love song of the birds

Shine! shine! shine!
Pour down your warmth great sun!
While we bask, we two together.
Two together!
Winds blow south, or winds blow north,
Day come white, night come black,
Home, or rivers and mountains from home,
Singing all time, minding no tune,
While we two keep together.

Wassail Song from 8 Traditional English Carols

(1919)

Traditional

We've been awhile a-wandering
Amongst the leaves so green,
But now we come a-wassailing,
So plainly to be seen;
For it's Christmas time, when we travel far and near;
May God bless you and send you a happy New Year.

We are not daily beggars
That beg from door to door;
We are your neighbours' children,
For we've been here before;
For it's Christmas time ...

Call up the butler of this house,
Likewise the mistress too,
And all the little children
That round the table go;
For it's Christmas time ...

Bring us out a table
And spread it with a cloth,
Bring us out some mouldy cheese
And some of your Christmas loaf;
For it's Christmas time ...

Good master and good mistress,
While you're sitting by the fire,
Pray think of us poor children
That's wandered in the mire;
For it's Christmas time ...