

# WIGMORE HALL

Monday 11 March 2024  
7.30pm

## Purcell - Songs and Dances

Tim Mead countertenor

### Les Musiciens de Saint-Julien

François Lazarevitch transverse flute,  
recorder, musette, director

Elsa Frank oboe, recorder

Josef Žák violin

Anaëlle Blanc violin

Sophie Iwamura viola

Garance Boizot viola da gamba

Mathieu Dupouy harpsichord, positive organ

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Chaconne - Curtain Tune from *Timon of Athens* Z632 (1695)

O solitude, my sweetest choice Z406 (1684-5)

From *The Fairy Queen* Z629 (1692)

One charming night • Chaconne • O let me weep

Here the Deities approve from *Welcome to all the pleasures (Ode for St Cecilia's Day)* Z339 (1683)

March from *The Married Beau* Z603 (1694)

We the spirits of the air from *The Indian Queen* Z630 (1695)

Hornpipe from *The Old Bachelor* Z607 (1693)

'Tis Nature's Voice from *Hail, bright Cecilia* Z328 (1692)

Here, let my life with as much silence slide from *If ever I more riches did desire* Z544 (c.1687)

When first Amintas sued for a kiss Z430 (1687)

### Interval

Dry those eyes from *The Tempest* Z631 (1695)

Sonata in 4 Parts No. 6 in G minor Z807 (pub. 1697)

May her blest example chase from *Love's goddess sure was blind* Z331 (1692)

Anon

Hey Boys, Up Go We

Henry Purcell

Borry from *Suite in G* Z770 (c.1682)

From *King Arthur* Z628 (1691)

Fairest Isle • What power art thou

Air from *The Virtuous Wife, or Good Luck at Last* Z611 (?1695)

Scotch Tune from *Amphitryon, or The Two Sosias* Z572 (1690)

'Twas within a furlong of Edinborough Town from *The Mock Marriage* Z605 (1695)

From *Amphitryon, or The Two Sosias* Z572

Minuet • Hornpipe • Borry

Strike the viol, touch the lute from *Come, ye sons of art, away* Z323 (1694)

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The recorder player Robert Ehrlich wrote a stimulating article about music business pyramids some years ago. Many of these exist: one for each voice and instrument, another for composers. No-one can climb to their chosen top unless all the lower tiers are also in place: famous composers need performer-collaborators to present their work to the public; performers with free time in their diaries need students to teach; students need music to sing and play – for which they rely on composers. The whole structure would collapse without audiences at its base, buying concert tickets and other merchandise and generally showing their support for professional endeavour.

This pyramid analogy sheds useful light on Henry Purcell's career, and on most of the music in tonight's programme. Purcell was the first undoubted superstar in British musical history. Commercial means of music exploitation needed to reach a certain stage of development before superstardom became possible, and that happened during his professional lifetime.

London musical theatre shows grew increasingly sophisticated after 1682 (Purcell was then in his early 20s), when the merger of two formerly rivalrous companies brought competition between them to a halt. From then on funds could be invested with ruthless efficiency – in a regular stream of fairly cheap-to-put-on play productions, and occasional 'semi-operatic' blockbusters for which audiences were prepared to pay inflated ticket prices of twice the usual.

Plays were easier to sell if they contained at least some music. Purcell could turn that out quickly – and did, for over 40 plays premièred or revived between 1682 and 1695. The raw number makes him seem improbably productive. Allowance must be made for his relatively minor contributions in some cases, plus his willingness to fulfil play music orders alongside fellow composers slightly below him in the pyramid of esteem. Most of the instrumental pieces in tonight's programme fall into this – as it must have felt to Purcell – 'occasional' category: tunes from *The Married Beau*, *The Old Bachelor*, *The Virtuous Wife* and *Amphitryon*. So does "Twas within a furlong of Edinborough Town", a song from *The Mock Marriage*. The speed with which he delivered theatre music in no way diminished its quality or inventiveness. Theatre managers dropped his name into press adverts for plays on any reasonable pretext. Music publishers bought his songs and rushed them into print, usually in the multi-composer anthologies that amateur performers around the country were keen to buy. He was, in modern terms, a hit machine, minting money for his business associates and prospering himself.

Sexual intrigue was a stock theme in English comedy of the Purcell period, as the list of titles above suggests. Even *Amphitryon* (by former poet laureate John Dryden, adapted from Molière who in turn had adapted it from a Latin original by Plautus) had a plot turning on adultery, admittedly in rather a convoluted way. Very unusually, the first printed edition of Dryden's script for *Amphitryon* of 1690 appeared with a supplement containing Purcell's

song settings; Dryden's preface praised the much younger composer as – at last – a British-born composer 'equal with the best abroad'. *Amphitryon* launched a partnership that bore spectacular fruit in *King Arthur* the following year.

Non-theatrical songs by Purcell appeared in print as well, some setting racy texts suited to performance in ale-house environments ('When first Amintas sued for a kiss' is an example in tonight's programme), while others appealed to amateur musicians who had or affected to have sterner morals ('O solitude', for instance), possibly the same ones as enjoyed playing serious instrumental pieces at home. Purcell's three- and four-part sonatas served this highbrow market. So did his self-published score for *Welcome to all the pleasures*. This had been commissioned by the members of a gentlemen's club dedicated to music making, in honour of music's supposed patron saint Cecilia.)

Although Purcell set out actively in search of commercial success, and without doubt achieved it, he had grown up in the service of King Charles II and knew that high prestige as a composer would require him to maintain a profile at court, hence his interest in court odes. He set odes of varying poetic quality to music for Charles II, then James II, then Queen Mary, taking turns with other court composers so that poorly-paid but reputationally necessary work could be shared out. 'Strike the viol, touch the lute' is a song from Purcell's 1694 Queen Mary birthday ode *Come, ye sons of art, away* – last in the series since both he and Mary died not long afterwards. Cunningly but characteristically, Purcell recycled parts of his trumpet overture for *Come, ye sons of art* into *The Indian Queen*. Court odes were performed once or twice only, to small audiences, while shows like *The Indian Queen* were meant to run and run.

Mention of *The Indian Queen* raises questions of definition that troubled Purcell's contemporaries far less than they do modern academics. Purcell wrote the music for just one all-sung opera, *Dido and Aeneas*. Plays striking an approximate 50:50 balance between straight acting and music were marketed as 'operas', and sometimes referred to pragmatically as 'semi-operas': *King Arthur* and *The Fairy Queen* belong in this category. *The Indian Queen* squeezes in, though it is less ambitious musically. In 1695, the year of *The Indian Queen*, Purcell wrote it for reduced forces because the merged company for which he had long been working broke up in 1694. *Timon of Athens* and *The Tempest* hover on the cusp: both were revivals to which Purcell contributed musical episodes around the time of the break-up. Though tonight's programme of extracts can be enjoyed without concern for the financial health of Purcell's main theatrical employer, Purcell himself would not have been so sanguine. When he died at the height of his fame, chunks of the pyramid on which he knew that fame rested were crumbling away.

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**Henry Purcell** (1659-1695)

**Chaconne - Curtain Tune from *Timon of Athens* Z632** (1695)

**O solitude, my sweetest choice Z406**  
(1684-5)

*Katherine Philips after Antoine Girard de Saint-Amant*

O solitude, my sweetest choice!  
Places devoted to the night,  
Remote from tumult and from noise,  
How ye my restless thoughts delight!  
O solitude, my sweetest choice!  
O heav'ns! what content is mine,  
To see these trees, which have appear'd  
From the nativity of time,  
And which all ages have rever'd,  
To look today as fresh and green  
As when their beauties first were seen.  
O, how agreeable a sight  
These hanging mountains do appear,  
Which th'unhappy would invite  
To finish all their sorrows here,  
When their hard fate makes them endure  
Such woes as only death can cure.  
O, how I solitude adore!  
That element of noblest wit,  
Where I have learnt Apollo's lore,  
Without the pains to study it.  
For thy sake I in love am grown  
With what thy fancy does pursue;  
But when I think upon my own,  
I hate it for that reason too,  
Because it needs must hinder me  
From seeing and from serving thee.  
O solitude, O how I solitude adore!

**From *The Fairy Queen* Z629** (1692)  
*Anonymous, after William Shakespeare*

**One charming night**

One charming night  
Gives more delight  
Than a hundred lucky days.  
Night and I improve the feast,  
Make the pleasure longer last,  
A thousand thousand several ways.

**Chaconne**

**O let me weep**

O, let me weep, for ever weep!  
My eyes no more shall welcome sleep.  
I'll hide me from the sight of day,  
And sigh, sigh, sigh my soul away.  
He's gone, he's gone, his loss deplore  
And I shall never see him more.

**Here the Deities approve from *Welcome to all the pleasures (Ode for St Cecilia's Day)* Z339** (1683)

*Christopher Fishburn*

*Aria*

All the blessings they have sent you,  
All the talents they have lent you,  
Here the Deities approve  
Live and thrive so well below.  
Pleas'd to see what they bestow,  
The God of Music and of Love;

**March from *The Married Beau* Z603** (1694)

**We the spirits of the air from *The Indian Queen* Z630** (1695)

*John Dryden and Robert Howard*

We, the spirits of the air  
That of human things take care,  
Out of pity now descend  
To forewarn what woes attend.  
Greatness clogg'd with scorn decays,  
With the slave no empire stays.  
Cease to languish then in vain  
Since never to be loved again.

**Hornpipe from *The Old Bachelor* Z607**  
(1693)

**'Tis Nature's Voice from *Hail, bright Cecilia* Z328** (1692)

*Nicholas Brady*

'Tis Nature's Voice; thro' all the moving Wood  
Of Creatures understood:  
The Universal Tongue to none  
Of all her num'rous Race unknown.  
From her it learnt the mighty Art  
To court the Ear or strike the Heart:  
At once the Passions to express and move;  
We hear, and straight we grieve or hate, rejoiced or love;  
In unseen Chains it does the Fancy bind;  
At once it charms the Sense and captivates the Mind.

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

**Here, let my life with as much silence slide  
from *If ever I more riches did desire* Z544**

(c.1687)

*Abraham Cowley*

If ever I more riches did desire  
Than cleanliness and quiet do require,  
If e'er Ambition did my fancy cheat  
With any wish so mean as to be great,  
Continue, Heaven, still from me to remove  
The humble blessings of this life I love.  
Upon the slippery tops of human state,  
The gilded pinnacles of fate,  
Let others proudly stand, and for a while  
The giddy danger to beguile,  
With joy and with disdain look down on all,  
Till their heads turn, and down they fall.  
Me, O ye gods, on Earth, or else so near  
That I no fall to Earth may fear;  
And, O ye gods, at a good distance seat  
From the long ruins of the great.

Here wrapt in the arms of quiet let me lie;  
Quiet, companion of obscurity.  
Here, let my life with as much silence slide  
As time that measures it does glide.  
Nor let the breath of Infamy and Fame  
From town to town echo about my name;  
Nor let my homely death embroidered be  
With scutcheon or with elegy.  
An old plebeian let me die,  
Alas, all then are such as well as I.  
To him, alas, to him I fear  
The face of Death will terrible appear,  
Who in his life flatt'ring his senseless pride  
By being known to all the world beside,  
Does not himself, when he is dying, know,  
Nor what he is, nor whither he's to go.

**When first Amintas sued for a kiss Z430**

(1687)

*Thomas D'Urfey*

When first Amintas sued for a kiss,  
My innocent heart was tender,  
That though I push'd him away from the bliss,  
My eyes declar'd my heart was won.  
I fain an artful coyness would use,  
Before I the fort did surrender,  
But love would suffer no more such abuse  
And soon, alas! my cheat was known.  
He'd sit all day, and laugh and play,  
A thousand pretty things would say;  
My hand he squeeze, and press my knees,  
'Till further on he got by degrees.

My heart, just like a vessel at sea,  
Would toss when Amintas came near me,  
But ah! so cunning a pilot was he,

Through doubts and fears he'd still sail on.  
I thought in him no danger could be,  
So wisely he knew how to steer me,  
And soon, alas! was brought to agree  
To taste of joys before unknown.  
Well might he boast his pain not lost,  
For soon he found the golden coast,  
Enjoyed the ore, and touched the shore  
Where never merchant went before.

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**Interval**

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**Henry Purcell**

**Dry those eyes from *The Tempest* Z631**

(1695)

*John Dryden and William Davenant, after William Shakespeare*

Dry those eyes which are o'erflowing,  
All your storms are over-blowing,  
While you in this isle are biding,  
You shall feast without providing.  
Every dainty you can think of,  
Every wine which you would drink of  
Shall be yours, all want shall shun you,  
Ceres' blessing so is on you.

**Sonata in 4 Parts No. 6 in G minor Z807**

(pub. 1697)

**May her blest example chase from**

***Love's goddess sure was blind* Z331 (1692)**

*Charles Sedley*

May her blest example chase  
Vice in troops out of the land,  
Flying from her awful face,  
Like trembling ghosts when day's at hand.  
May her hero bring us peace,  
Won with honour in the field,  
And our home-bred factions cease,  
He still our sword and she our shield.

**Anon**

**Hey Boys, Up Go We**

**Henry Purcell**

**Borry from *Suite in G* Z770 (c.1682)**

## From *King Arthur* Z628 (1691)

John Dryden

### Fairest Isle

Fairest isle, all isles excelling,  
Seat of pleasure and of love.  
Venus here will choose her dwelling,  
And forsake her Cyprian grove.  
Cupid from his fav'rite nation  
Care and envy will remove;  
Jealousy, that poisons passion,  
And despair, that dies for love.

Gentle murmurs, sweet complaining,  
Sighs that blow the fire of love,  
Soft repulses, kind disdainings,  
Shall be all the pains you prove.  
Ev'ry swain shall pay his duty,  
Grateful ev'ry nymph shall prove;  
And as these excel in beauty,  
Those shall be renown'd for love.

### What power art thou

What power art thou, who from below  
Hast made me rise unwillingly and slow  
From beds of everlasting snow?  
See'st thou not how stiff and wondrous old,  
Far unfit to bear the bitter cold,  
I can scarcely move or draw my breath?  
Let me, let me freeze again to death.

## Air from *The Virtuous Wife, or Good Luck at Last* Z611 (?1695)

## Scotch Tune from *Amphitryon, or The Two Sosas* Z572 (1690)

## 'Twas within a furlong of Edinborough Town from *The Mock Marriage* Z605 (1695)

Thomas D'Urfey

'Twas within a furlong of Edinborough Town,  
In the rosy time of year,  
When the grass was down,  
Bonny Jockey blith and gay,  
Said to Jenny making hay,  
Let's sit a little, dear, and prattle,  
'Tis a sultry day:  
He long had courted the black-brow'd maid,  
But Jockey was a wag  
And would ne'er consent to wed;  
Which made her pish and phoo,  
And cry out 'It will not do,  
I cannot, cannot, cannot, wonnot,  
Wonnot buckle too.'

He told her marriage was grown a meer joke,  
And that no one wedded now,  
But the scoundrel folk;  
Yet, my dear, thou should'st prevail,  
But I know not what I ail,  
I shall dream of clogs, and silly dogs  
With bottles at their tail;  
But I'll give thee gloves  
And a bongrace to wear,  
And a pretty filly-foal  
To ride out and take the air;  
If thou ne'er will pish or phoo,  
And cry 'It ne'er shall do,  
I cannot, cannot, cannot, wonnot,  
Wonnot buckle too.'

'That you'll give me trinkets',  
Cry'd she, 'I believe,  
But ah! what in return  
Must your poor Jenny give?  
When my maiden treasure's gone,  
I must gang to London Town,  
And roar and rant, and patch and paint,  
And kiss for half a crown:  
Each drunken bully oblige for pay,  
And earn an hated living  
In an odious fulsome way.  
No, no, no, it ne'er shall do,  
For a wife I'll be to you,  
Or I cannot, cannot, cannot, wonnot,  
Wonnot buckle too.'

## From *Amphitryon, or The Two Sosas* Z572

### Minuet

### Hornpipe

### Borry

## Strike the viol, touch the lute from *Come, ye sons of art, away* Z323 (1694)

?Nahum Tate

Strike the viol, touch the lute,  
Wake the harp, inspire the flute.  
Sing your patroness's praise,  
In cheerful and harmonious lays.