

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 12 May 2023
7.30pm

Supported by The Woolbeding Charity

England's Orpheus

Iestyn Davies countertenor
Thomas Dunford lute

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

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

By beauteous softness mixed with majesty from *Now Does the Glorious Day Appear (Ode for Queen Mary's Birthday)* Z332 (1689)

Lord, what is man? (A Divine Hymn) Z192 (pub. 1693)

Robert de Visée (c.1655-1732)

Chaconne in D minor

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Hendel, non può mia musa HWV117 (1708)

Marin Marais (1656-1728)

Les Voix Humaines (pub. 1701)

John Dowland (1563-1626)

Preludium

A Dream

Behold a wonder here (pub. 1603)

Sorrow, stay, lend true repentant tears (pub. 1600)

The King of Denmark, his Galliard (pub. 1605)

Can she excuse my wrongs (pub. 1597)

Flow, my tears (pub. 1600)

George Frideric Handel

Hide me from day's garish eye from *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* HWV55 (1740)

Interval

Henry Purcell

Sweeter than roses Z585 (1695)

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Prélude from Cello Suite No. 1 in G BWV1007 (c.1720)

John Dowland

Come again, sweet love doth now invite (pub. 1597)

Henry Purcell

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

Johann Sebastian Bach

Allemande from Cello Suite No. 1 in G BWV1007

George Frideric Handel

O Lord, whose mercies numberless from *Sau/HWV53* (1738)

Johann Sebastian Bach

From Cello Suite No. 1 in G BWV1007

Courante • Sarabande

John Dowland

In darkness let me dwell (pub. 1610)

Johann Sebastian Bach

From Cello Suite No. 1 in G BWV1007

Menuet I and II • Gigue

Henry Purcell

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

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England's Orpheus

Orpheus Britannicus – 'Britain's Orpheus' – was the title of a posthumous collection of songs by **Henry Purcell** who died aged 36 in 1695. His wife Frances authorised the publication, reciprocating perhaps the devotion of the Orpheus of myth who had descended to the underworld to bring back his dead wife; more successful than he, the publication brought Frances's husband back to life.

It includes the song 'Strike the viol' from the 1694 birthday ode for Queen Mary. The gentle words - the lutenist 'touches' not plucks - are by poet laureate Nahum Tate, lyricist of *Dido and Aeneas*. Queen Mary died later that year. The first of Purcell's six odes for her, written in 1689, featured the ravishing 'By beauteous softness', composed over a ground bass, a riff or repeating sequence of 24 notes (six bars), the melody never quite synchronising until the final chord, a technique of which Purcell was the master.

He composed for the court, the theatre and, as organist of Westminster Abbey, the church. He set several lyrics by the late Bishop of Lincoln William Fuller including 'Lord, what is man?', published in the collection *Harmonia Sacra* in 1693. The opening in freely rhythmic recitative compares man to a worm, the middle dances calling for a quill to write God's praise, and the conclusion is a joyful hallelujah, the composer freed from word-setting.

The singer rests while the lutenist plays the *Chaconne in D minor* by **Robert de Visée**, court musician to Louis XIV beside whose four-poster bed he often played. Like the ground bass, the chaconne revolves to a repeating chord sequence.

Purcell's death left a vacuum which was eventually filled by **George Frideric Handel**, a native German who arrived in London from Italy in 1708. He was described that year as the 'novello Orfeo' (the 'new Orpheus') in a lyric by his Roman patron Cardinal Pamphili for the cantata 'Hendel, non può mia musa', in which two recitatives and arias celebrate the Orphic gift of music.

Marin Marais was a virtuoso of the viol at the French court. The instrument is tuned as the lute so transcription is hardly necessary. *Les Voix Humaines*, with its interweaving voices, dates from Marais's second book of viol pieces published in 1701.

Shakespeare's contemporary, the lutenist **John Dowland**, was in turn described as the English Orpheus. His *Preludium* might have preceded a play, and *A Dream* might conjure the surreal magical virtual world of the drama. Despite his fame, Dowland never secured a job at Queen Elizabeth's court and wrote four albums of songs to offset the expenses of his life as a peripatetic musician around Europe. 'Behold a wonder here' is from his Third Book, published 1603, and may indeed derive from a play by the Earl of Essex about Cupid cured of blindness – 'Love hath received his sight'. 'Sorrow, stay' from Book Two (1600) has brief Italianate recitative – 'pity, pity, pity' – before its syncopated falling and rising refrain, music matching words, used in 1607 in a staged satire by Francis Beaumont. The spirited 'Can she excuse my wrongs' from Book One

(1597) has words by the Earl of Essex seemingly addressed to Elizabeth - who said 'no' and beheaded him. The album was hugely successful and reprinted five times in 15 years. 'Flow, my tears' from Book Two is the song version of *Lachrimae*, Dowland's most famous piece, copied out by lutenists all over Europe, and supposed to be what inspired *Twelfth Night's* opening, 'If music be the food of love'. That strain again – it hath a dying fall...

The first half concludes with the 'Thoughtful Man's' *largo e pianissimo* aria 'Hide me from day's garish eye' from Handel's 1740 cantata *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*, to poems by John Milton. 'Sweet music breathe,' the singer whispers on a vapour of tone.

Part two features a complete performance of **Bach's** Cello Suite No. 1 transcribed for Baroque lute, the movements interspersed with songs by the three Orpheuses from the first half. The suite is one of six dating from around 1720 when Bach was employed as music director to Prince Leopold of Cöthen. It consists of a *Prélude* and five dances, each with a different European provenance, identified below. Bach transcribed the fifth suite for lute which gave later generations the excuse to lutenise the rest.

Purcell's exquisitely expressive song 'Sweeter than roses' begins the half, composed shortly before his death to words by Richard Norton for the play *Pausanias*. The slow preamble seductively extends the syllable of 'cool' and tantalisingly repeats 'dear' before its noun 'kiss' arrives. Bach's *Prélude* follows.

Dowland's 'Come again, sweet love doth now invite' from the First Book is a love song with a gasp between each verb - see, hear, touch, kiss, die - in erotic word-painting. Purcell's 'O solitude, my sweetest choice' is a long, serene setting over a ground bass of words by Katherine Phillips aka 'The Matchless Orinda', patron of a literary salon in Wales, whose remoteness delights her restless thoughts. Bach's *Allemande*, a German dance of running semiquavers in four-time, is next.

Handel's 'O Lord, whose mercies numberless' is an aria 'of simple purity' sung by David in the 1738 oratorio *Saul* to words by Charles Jennens, the *Messiah* librettist. Its beauty arouses Saul's jealousy. David's harp music which follows is replaced here with Bach's *Courante*, a capricious Italian dance in three-time, and *Sarabande*, a slow Spanish dance in four.

Dowland at last achieved a court post under King James in 1610 and composed little more. His son Robert published that year a collection of works from his father's travels including his last and perhaps most beautiful song, 'In darkness let me dwell', deliciously jarring music which ends as it begins, hanging on an unfinished cadence.

Bach's *Menuet I and II* are French dances in quick three-time and the English *Gigue* skips in six-eight. Purcell's sublime Evening Hymn 'Now that the sun hath veiled his light' closes the evening on a fluid ground bass falling gently to slumber. Orpheus becomes Morpheus.

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Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

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.

By beauteous softness mixed with majesty from *Now Does the Glorious Day Appear (Ode for Queen Mary's Birthday)* Z332 (1689)

Henry Purcell, after Thomas Shadwell

By beauteous softness mixed with majesty
An empire over every heart she gains;
And from her awful power none could be free
She with such sweetness and such justice reigns.

Lord, what is man? (A Divine Hymn) Z192

(pub. 1693)

William Fuller

Lord, what is man, lost man, that thou should'st be
So mindful of him, that the Son of God
Forsook his glory, his abode,
To become a poor, tormented man?
The deity was shrunk into a span,
And that for me, O wondrous love, for me.
Reveal, ye glorious spirits, when ye knew
The way the Son of God took to renew
Lost man, your vacant places to supply,
Blest spirits, tell,
Which did excel,
Which was more prevalent,
Your joy or your astonishment,
That man should be assum'd into the deity,
That for a worm a God should die?

O for a quill drawn from your wing
To write the praises of eternal love;
O for a voice like yours to sing
That anthem here which once you sung above.
Hallelujah!

Robert de Visée (c.1655-1732)

Chaconne in D minor

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Hendel, non può mia musa HWV117 (1708)

Cardinal Benedetto
Pamphili

Recitativo
Hendel, non può mia
Musa
Cantare in un istante
Versi che degni sian della tua
lira.
Ma sento che in me spira
Sì soave armonia che ai tuoi
concenti
Son costretto a cantare in
questi accenti.

Aria
Puote Orfeo col dolce
suono
Arrestar d'augelli il volo
E fermar di belva il
piè,
Si muoverò a sì bel
suono
Tronchi, sassi ancor dal
suolo,
Ma giammai cantar li
fé.

Recitativo
Dunque maggior
d'Orfeo
Tu muovi al canto la mia
Musa all'ora
Che il plettro appeso avea a
un tronco annoso
E immobile
giacea.

Aria
Ogn'un canti, e
all'Armonia
Di novello Orfeo si
dia
Alla destra il moto, al
canto
Voce tal che mai
s'udi.
E in sì grata melodia
Tutta gioia l'alma sia
Ingannando il tempo
intanto
Passi lieto e l'ore e'l dì.

Handel, my Muse cannot sing

Recitative
Handel, my Muse cannot
sing
lines worthy of your lyre
at a moment's
notice.
Yet I feel so fine a harmony
alive within me that I am
compelled
to sing these words to
your music.

Aria
With his sweet song,
Orpheus
could stop birds in flight
and wild beasts in their
tracks.
So fair was its sound that
both
trees and stones
gathered to listen,
but never did he cause
them to sing.

Recitative
Greater than Orpheus,
therefore,
you move my Muse now
to song
when she had hung her
plectrum
on an ancient tree and
was lying quite still.

Aria
Let all men sing, and as
we hear the music
of a new Orpheus, may
movement
be restored to our right
hand, and a
new-found voice be
brought to our song.
And may our spirits rejoice
in such beautiful melody,
happily spending the
hours and days
thus whiling away the time.

Marin Marais (1656-1728)

Les Voix Humaines (pub. 1701)

John Dowland (1563-1626)

Preludium

A Dream

Behold a wonder here (pub. 1603)

Anonymous

Behold a wonder here:

Love hath receiv'd his sight,
Which many hundred years
Hath not beheld the light.

Such beams infused be
By Cynthia in his eyes,
As first have made him see
And then have made him wise.

Love now no more will weep
For them that laugh the while,
Nor wake for them that sleep,
Nor sigh for them that smile.

So pow'rful is the beauty
That Love doth now behold,
As Love is turn'd to duty,
That's neither blind nor bold.

This beauty shows her might
To be of double kind,
In giving Love his sight
And striking Folly blind.

Sorrow, stay, lend true repentant tears

(pub. 1600)

Anonymous

Sorrow, stay, lend true repentant tears,
To a woeful wretched wight,
Hence, despair with thy tormenting fears:
O do not my poor heart affright.
Pity, help now or never,
Mark me not to endless pain,
Alas I am condemned ever,
No hope, no help there doth remain,
But down, down, down, down I fall,
Down and arise I never shall.

The King of Denmark, his Galliard (pub. 1605)

Can she excuse my wrongs (pub. 1597)

Anonymous

Can she excuse my wrongs with Virtue's cloak?
Shall I call her good when she proves unkind?
Are those clear fires which vanish into smoke?
Must I praise the leaves where no fruit I find?
No, no; where shadows do for bodies stand,
That may'st be abus'd if thy sight be dim.
Cold love is like to words written on sand,
Or to bubbles which on the water swim.
Wilt thou be thus abused still,
Seeing that she will right thee never?
If thou canst not o'ercome her will,
Thy love will be thus fruitless ever.

Was I so base, that I might not aspire
Unto those high joys which she holds from me?
As they are high, so high is my desire,
If she this deny, what can granted be?
If she will yield to that which reason is,
It is reason's will that love should be just.
Dear, make me happy still by granting this,
Or cut off delays if that die I must.
Better a thousand times to die
Than for to love thus still tormented:
Dear, but remember it was I
Who for thy sake did die contented.

Flow, my tears (pub. 1600)

Anonymous

Flow, my tears, fall from your springs!
Exiled for ever, let me mourn;
Where night's black bird her sad infamy sings,
There let me live forlorn.

Down vain lights, shine you no more!
No nights are dark enough for those
That in despair their lost fortunes deplore.
Light doth but shame disclose.

Never may my woes be relieved,
Since pity is fled;
And tears and sighs and groans my weary days
Of all joys have deprived.

From the highest spire of contentment
My fortune is thrown;
And fear and grief and pain for my deserts
Are my hopes, since hope is gone.

Hark! you shadows that in darkness dwell,
Learn to contemn light.
Happy, happy they that in hell
Feel not the world's despite.

George Frideric Handel

Hide me from day's garish eye from *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* HWV55 (1740)

John Milton

Hide me from day's garish eye,
While the bee, with honey'd thigh,
Which at her flow'ry work doth sing,
And the waters murmuring,
With such concert as they keep
Entice the dewy-feather'd sleep:
And let some strange mysterious dream
Wave at his wings, in airy stream
Of lively portraiture display'd,
Softly on my eyelids laid.
Then, as I wake, sweet music breathe
Above, about, or underneath,
Sent by some spirit to mortal's good,
Or th'unseen genius of the wood.

Interval

Henry Purcell

Sweeter than roses Z585 (1695)

Anonymous

Sweeter than roses,
Or cool evening breeze on a warm flowery shore,
Was the dear kiss first trembling made me freeze,
Then shot like fire all o'er.
What magic has victorious love!
For all I touch or see since that dear kiss,
I hourly prove, all is love to me.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Prélude from Cello Suite No. 1 in G BWV1007

(c.1720)

John Dowland

Come again, sweet love doth now invite

(pub. 1597)

Anonymous

Come again, sweet love doth now invite
Thy graces, that refrain
To do me due delight,
To see, to hear, to touch, to kiss, to die
With thee again in sweetest sympathy.

Come again, that I may cease to mourn
Through thy unkind disdain.

For now left and forlorn
I sit, I sigh, I weep, I faint, I die
In deadly pain and endless misery.

All the day the sun that lends me shine
By frowns do cause me pine,
And feeds me with delay;
Her smiles my springs that makes my joys to grow;
Her frowns the winters of my woe.

All the night my sleeps are full of dreams,
My eyes are full of streams;
My heart takes no delight
To see the fruits and joys that some do find,
And mark the storms are me assigned.

Henry Purcell

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!

Johann Sebastian Bach

Allemande from Cello Suite No. 1 in G BWV1007

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

George Frideric Handel

O Lord, whose mercies numberless from *Saul* HWV53 (1738)

O Lord, whose mercies numberless
O'er all thy works prevail:
Though daily man Thy law transgress,
Thy patience cannot fail.
If yet his sin be not too great,
The busy fi end control;
Yet longer for repentance wait,
And heal his wounded soul.

Johann Sebastian Bach

From Cello Suite No. 1 in G BWV1007

Courante
Sarabande

John Dowland

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.

Johann Sebastian Bach

From Cello Suite No. 1 in G BWV1007

Menuet I and II
Gigue

Henry Purcell

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