

Henry Purcell came from a family of professional musicians, and began his training as a chorister of the Chapel Royal under Humfrey and Blow, becoming part of a circle of leading musicians based around Westminster. At an early age he was organist of both the Chapel Royal and of Westminster Abbey. As well as a great deal of church music, he composed operas, odes, theatre, chamber and keyboard music. The charming duet 'Hark! how the songsters' (1695) is from *Timon of Athens* (a bowdlerization of Shakespeare's play produced by Thomas Shadwell), while the Chacony in G minor for strings is a set of variations on a repeated ground bass, a genre he excelled at.

Like Purcell, **John Blow** spent his career in London, with posts at Westminster Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral and the Chapel Royal. Blow's output was substantial, including the masque *Venus and Adonis*, 30 court odes and hundreds of anthems and songs. Some of the latter were collected in the publication *Amphion Anglicus* on 1700, which is the source of the duet 'Ah heav'n! What is't I hear?'. 'Ye brethren of the Lyre' comes from Blow's moving lament *An Ode on the Death of Mr Henry Purcell*, while *Paratum cor meum* is a rare example of Blow setting a Latin sacred text.

Matthew Locke began as a chorister at Exeter Cathedral under Edward Gibbons. His London career included writing theatre music, being composer to the king and organist of Catherine of Braganza's private chapel, as well as publishing a treatise called *Melothesia* (1673). *The Tempest* (1674) was another Shadwell Shakespeare adaptation, for which Locke provided incidental music for scene changes (as in the 'Curtain Tune') and to set the mood (there are rare performance directions like 'violent' and 'soft and slow by degrees').

Musical prodigy **Pelham Humfrey** was sent abroad to study in France by Charles II. There he assimilated the new French musical style favoured by the king, and also the social style - Samuel Pepys cuttingly called him an 'absolute monsieur, as full of form and confidence and vanity'. Apparently set fair in his new career as Master of the Children of the Chapel Royal and court composer, he died tragically young at the age of 27. *Sleep, downy sleep* is an evening hymn, to a text by Thomas Flatman.

John Dowland was the leading English composer for the lute, but professional success eluded him at first despite his 'heavenly touch upon the lute'. After gaining the Oxford BMus in 1588, and waiting a decade for preferment, he decided to try his hand abroad, and went to the court of Christian IV of Denmark, where he was handsomely rewarded. However, he continued to publish in London, and returned there a decade later, at last becoming one of the royal lutenists in 1612. As well as virtuoso solo lute works and four books of songs (1597-1612), he composed the viol consort collection *Lachrimae, or Seaven Tears* and a number of other vocal works. Both 'Come again, sweet love

doth now invite' and 'Can she excuse my wrongs' come from *The First Booke of Songes* (1597).

Thomas Campion is now remembered as both composer and poet, but qualified as a doctor, after having trained as a lawyer. He began publishing as a poet in his early twenties, in collaboration with composer Philip Rosseter then on his own account. Thereafter he wrote music for masques (court entertainments), and published three Books of Airs and a counterpoint treatise; the simple and melodic 'Never weather-beaten saile' is from the *First Book* of 1601.

George Frideric Handel was born in Halle and studied with Zachow, becoming cathedral organist at the remarkable age of 17. However, he soon moved to Hamburg in search of better opportunities. After his first two operas were produced there, he was drawn to Italy, the centre of operatic world, and then on to affluent London in 1712. After the opera vogue declined, he focused on English oratorio, bringing the same dramatic sense to Biblical and historical narratives. Such was his success that selections of favourite arias from his operas and oratorios were published, and tonight's concert assembles a series of such arias and duets, prefaced by the *Overture* from his first London opera *Rinaldo* (1711), and interspersed with instrumental movements from his set of 12 Concerti grossi, Op. 6. This collection was written in only three weeks in late 1739, and owes much to Corelli's famous 1714 concertos.

'Lord, to thee' from *Theodora* (1750), the tale of an early Christian martyr, begins Act III and is a prayer for succour sung by Irene, Theodora's friend. 'Up the dreadful steep ascending' is from *Jephtha* (1752), the tale of an ill-advised vow in the Old Testament, and written when Handel was losing his sight. In Act II, Hamor (who is in love with Jephtha's daughter) sings of love being greater than ambition. 'You've undone me' and 'Awake, Saturnia' are both from *Semele* (1744), which is more of a sacred opera than an oratorio. The first is a duet of recrimination between Ino and her betrothed Athamas, and the second is Juno's aria of vengeance against Semele. 'O Lord, whose mercies numberless' is from *Saul* (1739), another Old Testament drama, and is sung by the future King David. 'Streams of pleasure...Thither let our hearts aspire', again from *Theodora*, is a hymn of praise for martyrdom, sung by Didymus, who is love with Theodora, who then joins him in a duet. 'To my chaste Susanna's praise' is the final duet from Act III of *Susanna* (1749), where the heroine and her husband sing of their relief at her vindication as a moral wife.

© Dr Francis Knights 2025

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Hark! how the songsters from *Timon of Athens* Z632 (1695)

Thomas Shadwell

Hark! hark! how the Songsters of the Grove;
Sing, Sing Anthems to the God of Love.
Hark! hark! how each Amorous winged pair,
With Love's great Praises fill the Air;
On ev'ry side the Charming sound
Does from the hollow Woods rebound.

John Blow (1649-1708)

Ah heav'n, what is't I hear? from *Amphion Angelicus* (1700)

Anonymous

The warbling lute enchants my ear,
I hear the warbling lute,
The warbling lute enchants my ear;
Now beauty's pow'r inflames my breast again,
I sigh, I languish in a pleasing pain;
The note's so soft, so sweet the ayre;
The soul of love sure must be there;
That mine in rapture charms,
And drive away despair.
Ah heav'n! What is't I hear?

Matthew Locke (c.1621-1677)

From *Suite from The Tempest* (1674)

Curtain Tune
Galliard Lively
Liik Vigorously

Pelham Humfrey (1647-1674)

Sleep, downy sleep

Thomas Flatman

Sleep! downy sleep! come close my eyes,
Tired with beholding vanities!
Welcome, sweet sleep,
That drives away the toils and follies of the day.

On thy soft bosom will I lie,
Forget the world, and learn to die.
O Israel's watchful shepherd, spread
Tents of angels round my bed.

Let not the spirits of the air
Whilst I slumber, me ensnare;
But guard thy suppliant free from harms,
Clasped in thy everlasting arms.

Clouds and thick darkness is thy throne,
Thy wonderful pavilion;
O dart from thence a shining ray,
And then my midnight shall be day.

Thus when the morn, in crimson dressed,
Breaks through the windows of the east,
My hymns of thankful praise shall rise
Like incense of the morning sacrifice.

Thomas Campion (1567-1620)

Never weather-beaten saile more willing bent to shore (pub. 1613)

Thomas Campion

Never weather-beaten Saile more willing bent to shore,
Never tyred Pilgrims limbs affected slumber more;
Then my weary spright now longs to flye out of my
troubled brest.
O come quickly sweetest Lord, and take my soule to rest.
Ever-blooming are the joyes of Heav'ns high paradise,
Cold age deafes not there our eares, nor vapour dims our
eyes;
Glory there the Sun out-shines, whose beames the
blessed onely see.
O come quickly glorious Lord, and raise my spright to
thee.

John Blow

Ye brethren of the Lyre from *An Ode on the Death of Mr Henry Purcell* (1696)

John Dryden

Ye brethren of the lyre, and tuneful voice,
Lament his lot; but at your own rejoyce.
Now live secure, and linger out your days:
The gods are pleas'd alone with Purcell's lays,
Nor know to mend their choice.

Henry Purcell

Chacony in G minor Z730 (c.1678)

John Dowland (1563-1626)

Come again, sweet love doth now invite (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.

Gentle Love,
Draw forth thy wounding dart,
Thou canst not pierce her heart,
For I that to approve,
By sighs and tears more hot than are thy shafts,
Did tempt, while she for mighty triumph laughs.

Can she excuse my wrongs (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.

John Blow

Paratum cor meum

Biblical text

Paratum cor meum, Deus, paratum cor meum;	O God, my heart is fixed;
Cantabo, et psallam in gloria mea.	I will sing and give praise, even with my glory.
Exsurge, gloria mea; exsurge, psalterium et cithara;	Awake, psaltery and harp;
Exurgam diluculo.	I myself will awake early.
Confitebor tibi in populis, Domine,	I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people;
Et psallam tibi in nationibus:	and I will sing praises to thee among the nations,
Quia magna est super cælos misericordia tua,	for great is your mercy above the heavens
Et usque ad nubes veritas tua.	and thy truth reacheth the clouds.
Exaltare super cælos, Deus,	Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens,
Et super omnem terram gloria tua.	and thy glory above the earth.

Interval

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Overture from *Rinaldo* HWV7 (1711, rev. 1717-31)

Giacomo Rossi, after Aaron Hill

Lord, to thee from *Theodora* HWV68 (1749)

Thomas Morell

Irene

Lord, to Thee each night and day,
Strong in hope, we sing and pray.
Though convulsive rocks the ground,
And thy thunders roll around,
Still to Thee, each night and day,
We sing and pray.

Up the dreadful steep ascending from *Jephtha* HWV70 (1751)

Thomas Morell

Hamor

Up the dreadful steep ascending,
While for fame and love contending,
Sought I thee, my glorious prize.
And now, happy in the blessing,
Thee, my sweetest joy possessing,
Other honours I despise.
Up the dreadful steep.

You've undone me from *Semele* HWV58 (1743)

William Congreve

Ino:

You've undone me,
Look not on me!
Guilt upbraiding,
Shame invading,
You've undone me,
Look not on me!

Athamas:

With my life I would atone
Pains you've borne, to me unknown.
Cease to shun me!

Both:

Love alone
Has both undone!

Concerto Grosso in B flat Op. 6 No. 7 HWV325 (1739)

I. Largo

II. Allegro

III. Largo e piano

V. Hornpipe

Awake, Saturnia...Iris hence away from *Semele* HWV58

William Congreve

Juno

Awake Saturnia from thylethargy;
Seize, destroy the curst adulteress.
Scale proud Citheron's top:
Snatch her, tear her in thy fury,
And down, down to the flood of Acheron
Let her fall, let her fall, fall, fall:
Rolling down to the depths of night,
Never more to behold the Light.
If I th'Imperial scepter sway—I swear
By Hell!
Tremble thou universe this oath to hear,
Not one of curst Agenor's race to spare.

Iris

Hear, mighty Queen, while I recount
What obstacles you must surmount;
With Adamant the gates are barr'd,
Whose entrance tow fierce dragons guard:
At each approach they lash their forky stings,
And clap their brazen wings:
And as their scaly horrors rise,
They all at once disclose
A thousand fiery eyes,
Which never know repose.

Juno

Hence Iris, hence away,
Far from the realms of day;
O'er Scythian Hills to the Meotian Lake
A speedy flight we'll take:
There Somnus I'll compell
His downy bed to leave and silent cell:
With noise and light I will his peace molest,
Nor shall he sink again to pleasing rest,
'Till to my vow'd revenge he grants supplies,
And seals with sleep the wakeful dragon's eyes.

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

Charles Jennens

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 fiend control;
Yet longer for repentance wait,
And heal his wounded soul.

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

**Streams of pleasure...Thither let our hearts
aspire from *Theodora* HWV68**

Thomas Morell

Didymus

Streams of pleasure ever flowing,
Fruits ambrosial ever growing,
Golden thrones,
Starry crowns,
Are the triumphs of the Blest.
When from life's dull labours free,
Clad with immortality,
They enjoy a lasting rest.

Theodora and Didymus

Thither let our hearts aspire.
Objects pure of pure desire,
Still increasing,
Ever pleasing,
Wake the song, and tune the lyre,
Of the blissful holy choir.

From Concerto grosso in G Op. 6 No. 1 HWV319

(1739)

III. Adagio

IV. Allegro

To my chaste Susanna's praise from

***Susanna* HWV66 (1748)**

Anonymous

Joacim:

To my chaste Susanna's praise
I'll the swelling note prolong.

Susanna:

While my grateful voice I raise,
Thy dear name shall grace the song.

Joacim:

Echo, catch the tender strains,

Susanna:

On thy wings, the music bear,

Both:

'Til it reach the distant plains,
Dying, in the void of air.