

# WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 27 September 2022  
7.30pm

## The English Concert

Harry Bicket artistic director, organ

Hilary Cronin soprano

Joanna Songi soprano

Iestyn Davies countertenor

Hugh Cutting countertenor

Samuel Boden tenor

Rory Carver tenor

Ashley Riches bass

Edward Grint bass

Tuomo Suni violin I

Kinga Ujszászi violin II

Jordan Bowron viola

Louise Hogan viola

Joseph Crouch violoncello

Ismael Campanero Nieto violone

Sergio Bucheli theorbo

Organ provided by Simon Neal

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

My beloved spake Z28 (1677)

John Blow (1648-1708)

Chaconne in G

Henry Purcell

My heart is inditing Z30 (1685)

*Interval*

Henry Purcell

Chacony in G minor Z730 (c.1678)

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

Now Does the Glorious Day Appear (Ode for Queen Mary's Birthday) Z332 (1689)

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In a parallel musical universe without some of the composers very reasonably revered as great in the only one we know, John Blow would be Henry Purcell's obvious replacement. Since Blow was ten years older than Purcell, he obtained key musical positions at court before Purcell was eligible for consideration, and these were positions he still occupied when Purcell died. Purcell branched out into the commercial theatre-music world mainly because Blow, by accident of prior birth, had blocked his path to court promotion. Though Purcell kept on writing music for royal occasions - he had to, for reasons of prestige - Blow was much better paid for doing a comparable job. They remained on friendly terms despite this and took a close interest in each other's work, interest often extending to imitation and other forms of playfully rivalrous cross-reference.

The two chaconnes in tonight's programme contrast about as strongly as two chaconnes could. **Purcell's**, composed near the start of his adult career, is much the more conventional; **Blow's** anarchic by comparison, full of unexpected modulations, rushing scales and changes of time signature. Blow at his most unbuttoned, as here, offended 18th- and 19th-century ears, but his stock today is definitely on the rise.

*My beloved spake* is an early Purcell symphony anthem, dating from 1677 at the latest. It sets verses from *The Song of Solomon* in a manner reflecting rather than trying to hide their (by Bible standards) rather unusual lasciviousness.

*My heart is inditing*, one of two symphony anthems which Purcell produced for the coronation of James II and his queen Maria Beatrice ('Mary of Modena') on 23 April 1685, is a double choir piece written to impress the dignitaries gathered in Westminster Abbey, and to outshine colleagues who had also contributed coronation music - of course including Blow.

Henry Playford published two volumes of sacred songs edited by Purcell, *Harmonia Sacra* I and II (1688, 1693). They fed the market for material facilitating devotional singing at home, and through sheer quality helped to expand it. *Now that the sun hath veiled its light* ('An Evening Hymn') - from *Harmonia Sacra I* - takes Bishop William Fuller's nine-line poem and stretches it out over a ground bass to allow extended meditation on Fuller's simple theme.

The court ode performance tradition began in the 1670s, under Charles II. Composers relished the opportunity to write for large and varied forces; poets needed all their ingenuity to sound original while paying conventionally effusive compliments. No-one at the time saw the odes' occasional nature as an excuse to coast. Quite the contrary: occasions on which members of a court audience could be expected to listen to music rather than talking or dancing or eating their way through it were welcomed and enthusiastically exploited, being all too rare.

Ode production carried on seamlessly from one reign to the next. James II succeeded Charles II but fled into exile after three short years, sensibly admitting

defeat in the face of overwhelming British establishment opposition. (James had converted to Catholicism in the 1660s, a move fatally undermining his credibility as supposed Defender of the Anglican Faith.) William III and Mary II were jointly crowned in James's place - Mary being James's older daughter, and William her robustly Protestant Dutch husband.

*Now does the glorious day appear* was the first in a series of Purcell odes celebrating Queen Mary's birthday, one a year from 1689 to 1694. Her birthday fell on 30 April, and by that date in 1695 she was dead. Thomas Shadwell the 'true-blue Protestant poet' supplied the text. He had replaced John Dryden as poet laureate in 1689 (Dryden, another adult convert to Catholicism, lost his job along with James II), and could be counted on to express every necessary official sentiment.

The glorious day was Mary's birthday, 'mightiest ... of the year' because of its political potency. Without Mary there would have been no William, and no available means to dispose of James. Spring began with the vernal equinox, sometime in March, promising a plentiful harvest further down the seasonal line but not - unlike Mary's birthday - the eventual restoration of national liberty (freedom from Catholic monarchical rule as Shadwell presented it). The 'self-same [heavenly] Power' as had been used to create humankind in the first place ensured Mary's presence on earth ready to act when needed. Mary's 'beauteous softness' and 'sweetness' supported by the righteous power of the Protestant state made her a uniquely effective ruler; Mary's 'Hero' - her warrior husband William, scourge of the 'Papal World' - surrendered to her charms and laid the spoils of war at her feet. Everyone loved her; the nation could and should unite to sing her praises. Considering the strength of anti-Catholic feeling displayed in Shadwell's poem, Purcell's (for him) unprecedentedly Italianate setting seems more than a little ironic. *Now does the glorious day appear* opens not with a French overture but with an Italianate sinfonia in five parts (two viola lines rather than one). This five-part scoring is maintained throughout, to gloriously enriching harmonic effect. Oboes and recorders are not called for - instruments with an undisguisable French pedigree. Fanfare-like string figures suggest trumpets in the last choral movement, but real trumpets fail to appear. Here as elsewhere in the ode Purcell creates sumptuous impressions by brilliantly economical means. In mid-April 1689, as it happened, both houses of parliament resolved to support King William if he took England (alongside Holland and a number of other allies) to war with France; war which William formally declared on 7 May. James II was living in exile in France ... Purcell chose a good moment to demonstrate musical Francophobia, and he may have been encouraged to do so.

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## Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

### My beloved spake Z28 (1677)

*Liturgical text*

*Symphony*

My beloved spake and said unto me:  
Rise my love, my fair one, and come away.

For lo! the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.  
The flow'rs appear upon the earth,  
And the time of the singing of birds is come,  
Hallelujah!

And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.

The fig tree putteth forth her green figs,  
And the vines with the tender grape give a good  
smell.  
Rise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

My beloved is mine, and I am his.  
Hallelujah.

## John Blow (1648-1708)

### Chaconne in G

## Henry Purcell

### My heart is inditing Z30 (1685)

*Liturgical text*

My heart is inditing of a good matter:  
I speak of the things which I have made unto the King.  
At his right hand shall stand the Queen all glorious within:  
Her clothing is of wrought gold.

She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of  
needlework;  
The virgins that follow her shall bear her company.  
With joy and gladness shall they be brought,  
And shall enter into the King's palace.

Hearken, O daughter, consider, incline thine ear;  
Forget also thine own people and thy father's house.  
Instead of thy fathers thou shalt have children  
Whom thou may'st make princes in all lands.

Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem: praise thy God, O Sion;  
For kings shall be thy nursing fathers,  
And their queens thy nursing mothers.  
Alleluia. Amen.

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## Interval

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## Henry Purcell

### Chacony in G minor Z730 (c.1678)

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

(pub. 1688) *arranged by Harry Bicket*  
*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.

# Now Does the Glorious Day Appear (Ode for Queen Mary's Birthday) Z332 (1689)

Henry Purcell, after Thomas Shadwell

## *Symphony*

Now does the glorious day appear,  
The mightiest day of all the year.

Not any one such joy could bring,  
No, no, not that which ushers in the spring.  
That of ensuing plenty hopes does give,  
This did the hope of liberty retrieve.

This does our fertile isle with glory crown,  
And all the fruits it yields we now can call our own,  
On this bless'd day was our restorer born;  
Far above all let this the calendar adorn.

Now does the glorious day appear,  
The mightiest day of all the year.

It was a work of full as great a weight,  
And did require the self-same power,  
Which did frail humankind create,  
When they were lost them to restore.  
For a like act, Fate gave our Princess birth,  
Which adding to the Saints, made joy in Heaven,  
As well as triumph upon Earth,  
To which so great, so good a Queen was given.

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.

Her hero to whose conduct and whose arms  
The trembling Papal world their force must yield  
Must bend himself to her victorious charms,  
And give up all the trophies of each field.

Our dear religion, with our law's defence,  
To God her zeal, to man benevolence;  
Must her above all former monarchs raise  
To be the everlasting theme of praise.

Now, now, with one united voice  
Let us aloud proclaim our joys;  
'lô Triumphe' let us sing,  
And make Heaven's mighty concave ring.