

WIGMORE HALL 125

Sunday 28 September 2025
7.30pm

Baroque Trailblazers

Hugh Cutting countertenor
The English Concert

Harry Bicket director, harpsichord, organ

Nadja Zwiener violin

Tuomo Suni violin

Alfonso Leal del Ojo viola

Louise Hogan viola

Joseph Crouch cello

Alexander Jones double bass

Sergio Bucheli theorbo

Oliver Wass harp

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)

Barbara Strozzi (1619-1677)

E pur io torno from *L'incoronazione di Poppea*

Che si può fare

Begli occhi

Francesco Cavalli (1602-1676)

Biagio Marini (1594-1663)

Erme e solinghe cime from *La Calisto*

Passacalio Op. 22 No. 25

Johann Christoph Bach (1642-1703)

Ach, dass ich Wassers gnug hätte

Philipp Heinrich Erlebach (1657-1714)

Wer sich dem Himmel übergeben

Johann Philipp Krieger (1649-1725)

Adagio from Sonata a4 in F

Johann Christoph Bach

Es ist nun aus mit meinem Leben

Interval

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Arise, my muse from *Arise, my muse* Z320

'Tis Nature's Voice; thro' all the moving Wood from *Hail, bright Cecilia* Z328

John Blow (1649-1708)

Chaconne in G

Pelham Humfrey (1647-1674)

Sleep, downy sleep

John Blow

Lovely Selina

Henry Purcell

Sonata in 4 Parts No. 6 in G minor Z807 'Chaconna'

Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin from *Te Deum and Jubilate Deo* Z232

Fairest Isle from *King Arthur* Z628



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The idea of a male singer performing vocal parts that could just as (if not more) easily be performed by women, might seem strange. But in 16th- and 17th-century England – and, to an extent, Germany – this was accepted practice. The absence of women in the church required innovative musical solutions: boys could supply treble lines, but alto lines were sung by men using their 'falsetto' range, or 'head' voice. Purcell and many of his contemporaries wrote operatic roles for the voice type.

In the 18th Century, the castrato's rise in Italy and mainland Europe threatened the existence of the operatic countertenor. Castrati, whose soaring voices were preserved past childhood through surgical intervention, dominated the stage, while the countertenor was pushed into extinction by the Classical and Romantic eras' demands for lower, more powerful voices. The mid 20th Century saw a resurgence in its popularity, thanks to Alfred Deller, who dedicated his career to neglected Renaissance and Baroque works. Today, the countertenor enjoys a golden era performing not just music written for the voice type, but championing former castrato roles and arrangements of works originally intended for female voices.

Hugh Cutting has divided his programme into Italian, German and English music, beginning with Italy. Originally performed by a contralto, the role of Ottone in **Monteverdi's** final opera *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* has more recently been sung by a countertenor. In 'E pur io torno', Ottone declares his undying love for Poppea, describing her magnetic pull as 'a flame to the sphere of fire' and 'a stream to the sea'.

Barbara Strozzi's 'Che si può fare' is a lament for soprano and continuo, built over a recurring four-note descending pattern. The narrator addresses the stars and fate, the recurring question 'Che si può fare?' ('What can you do?') expressing resignation in the face of unfortunate circumstances – perhaps unrequited or lost love. Also originally for soprano and continuo, 'Begli occhi' ('Beautiful Eyes') is a passionate declaration of love, in music of hypnotic contrasts. 'Erme e solinghe cime', scored for castrato, is Endimione's melancholic aria from **Cavalli's** 1651 opera *La Calisto*. In it, he addresses lonely mountain peaks, lamenting his separation from Diana. It features long, ornamental vocal lines over sparse continuo accompaniment.

A beautiful and increasingly virtuosic instrumental passacaglia by Cavalli's contemporary **Biagio Marini** precedes our journey to Germany. **Johann Christoff Bach** was an older cousin of JS Bach and was organist of the Georgenkirche, Eisenach, birthplace of JS Bach. *Ach, dass ich Wassers gnug hätte* (Ah, that I had tears enough) is a rhapsodic lament that features an additional, twisting obbligato solo violin part, adding to the repentant mood. *Es ist nun aus mit meinem Leben* (Now my life is ended) is one of a pair of JC Bach's 'death arias' – the simplicity of its melody and strophic form proves extraordinarily effective. It's arranged here from its original choral scoring.

Sunnier climes await with the mid 17th-century **Philipp Heinrich Erlebach's** 'Wer sich dem Himmel übergeben'

('Who surrenders to heaven'). This title, however, is the explanatory subtitle for the aria 'Trocknet euch ihr heissen Zähren' ('Dry your hot tears'), taken from the second volume of the composer's 1710 collection *Harmonische Freude musicalischer Freunde* (Harmonic Joys for Musical Friends).

The brief but beautiful *Adagio* from the Sonata a4 in F by **Johann Philipp Krieger** is an early work. Krieger learnt his craft in Venice and Vienna, before being made Kapellmeister at Saxe-Weissenfels in Halle, eastern Germany.

The music of **Henry Purcell** dominates the third, English part of tonight's concert. 'Tis nature's voice' is the most remarkable movement from *Hail, bright Cecilia*, a 1692 ode commissioned by the Musical Society of London to celebrate the feast day of St Cecilia, the patron saint of music. This piece is an extended, highly decorated recitative requiring superb vocal control and expressive instincts. 'Arise, my muse' is the brief but majestic title aria from Purcell's 1690 *Ode for Queen Mary's Birthday*, one of several that the composer was commissioned to write for the monarch.

Unusually, the long-breathed Chaconna is the only movement that makes up Purcell's Sonata in G minor, one of the Ten Sonatas in Four Parts that were published posthumously by Purcell's impecunious widow. The two upper violins converse, clash and wind around one another over a repeated, irregular five-bar bassline.

'Vouchsafe', a ravishing, poignant plea for mercy, forms the tender heart of Purcell's *Te Deum*, completed in 1694 for St Cecilia's Day, a year before the composer's premature death at just 36. 'Fairest Isle' from the 1691 semi-opera *King Arthur* is one of Purcell's most exquisite creations. The aria is sung by Venus, who expresses her love for the island of Britain.

John Blow also had strong connections to the Chapel Royal, starting there as a gentleman of the choir, before becoming one of its organists and, eventually, choirmaster. Moving on to become organist of Westminster Abbey, Blow stepped aside in 1679 to allow Purcell to take up the post (he returned there after Purcell's untimely death). 'Lovely Selina', a tale of innocent love betrayed, is one of Blow's most endearing songs setting words by playwright Nathaniel Lee. In his four-part Chaconne in G, Blow writes increasingly complex string figuration over a recurring chord sequence, before coming to an altogether gentler rest.

Pelham Humfrey, who directed the choir at the Chapel Royal during Purcell's time there as a treble, was once described by Samuel Pepys as 'an absolute Monsieur [as] full of form and confidence and vanity, and disparages everything and everybody's skill but his own'. *Sleep, downy sleep* sets an anonymous text calling for protection through the night, before rejoicing in the prospect of the coming day.

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Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)

E pur io torno from *L'incoronazione di Poppea*

Giovanni Francesco
Busenello

Ottone

E pur io torno qui,
qual linea al
centro,
Qual foco a sfera e qual
ruscello al mare,
E se ben luce alcuna non
m'appare,
Ah! so ben io, che sta l mio
sol qui dentro.

Caro tetto amoroso,
Albergo di mia vita, e del mio
bene,
Il passo è l cor ad inchinarti
viene.

Apri un balcon,
Poppea,
Col bel viso in cui son le sorti
mie,
Previeni, anima mia, precorri
il die.

Sorgi, e disgombr omai,
Da questo ciel caligini, e
tenebre
Con il beato aprir di tue
palpebre.

Sogni, portate a volo,
Fate sentire in dolce
fantasia
Questi sospir alla diletta mia.

Ma che veggio,
infelice?
Non già fantasmi o pur
notturne larve,
Son questi i servi di Nerone;
ahi, ahi dunque
Agl' insensati venti
lo diffondo i lamenti.
Necessito le pietre a
deplorarmi.
Adoro questi marmi,
Amoreggio con lagrime un
balcone,
E in grembo
di Poppea dorme
Nerone.

What can you do?

Otho

I have come back to this
place, like a line to its
beginning,
a flame to the sphere of fire,
a stream to the sea,
and though I see no light
before me,
I know that my sun is
within these walls.

Beloved and loving palace,
under whose roof lies my
life and my love,
my heart and I come to
pay homage to you.

Step on to a balcony,
Poppaea,
reveal the fair face on
which my fate depends,
herald the break of day,
my beloved.

Arise, and banish all clouds
and darkness from the
sky
by opening your beautiful
eyes.

Dreams, take flight now,
carry my sighs to the one
I love
in a sweet reverie.

But what sight meets my
unhappy eyes?
These men are no ghosts
or spirits of the night,
they are Nero's guards;
alas, then,
I share my lament with
only the uncaring breeze.
I must ask the stones to
take pity on me.
I am praising these walls,
dreaming of a balcony
with tears in my eyes,
and all the while Nero lies
sleeping in Poppaea's
embrace.

Ah perfida Poppea,
Son queste le promesse e i
giuramenti,
Ch'accessero il cor mio?

Io di credula speme il seme
sparsi,
Ma l'aria e 'l cielo a' danni
miei rivolto ...

Ah, faithless Poppaea,
are these the vows and
promises
that filled my heart with fire?

I sowed a seed of
credulous hope,
but the elements, set
against me, ...

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

Barbara Strozzi (1619-1677)

Che si può fare

Sig. Brunacci

Che si può fare?
Le stelle rubelle
Non hanno pietà.
Che s'el cielo non dà
Un influxo di pace al mio
penare,
Che si può fare?

Che si può dire?
Da gl'astri disastri
Mi piovano ogn'hor;
Che le perfido
amor
Un respiro diniega al mio
martire,
Che si può dire?

Così va rio destin forte
tiranna,
Gl'innocenti
condanna:
Così l'oro più fido
Di costanza e di fè, lasso
conviene,
Io raffini d'ogn'hor fuoco di
pene.

Sì, sì, penar deggio,
Sì, che darei sospiri,
Deggio trarne i respiri.
In aspri guai per
eternarmi
Il ciel niega mia sorte
Al periodo vital
Punto di morte.

Voi spirti dannati
Ne sete beati
S'ogni eumenide
ria
Sol' è intenta a crucciar
l'anima mia.

Se sono sparite
Le furie di Dite,
Voi ne gl'elisi
eterni
I dì trahete io coverò gl'inferni.

Così avvien a chi
tocca
Calcar l'orme d'un cieco,
Al fin trabocca.

What can you do?

What can you do?
The stars, intractable,
have no pity.
Since the gods don't give
a measure of peace in my
suffering,
what can I do?

What can you say?
From the heavens disasters
keep raining down on me;
Since that treacherous
Cupid
denies respite to my
torture,
what can I say?

That's how it is with cruel
destiny
the powerful tyrant, it
condemns the innocent:
thus the purest gold
of constancy and
faithfulness, alas,
is continually refined in
the fire of pain.

Yes, yes, I have to suffer,
yes, I must sigh,
I must breathe with difficulty.
In order to eternalize my
trials
heaven witholds from me
the final period of death
to my lifespan.

You spirits of the damned,
you're blessed,
since all the cruel
Eumenides
are intent only on
torturing my soul.

Since the furies of Dis
have disappeared,
you spend your days in
the Elysian fields
while I molder in hell.

Thus it happens that he
who follows
the shadow of a blind god
stumbles in the end.

Begli occhi

Anonymous

Voi pur, begl'occhi,
sete
Porte d'un paradiso,
Voi tra le scherzo e 'l riso
In ciel m'introducete
Ma tanto il cor
m'ardete
Che dal mio foco
eterno
Per le porte del ciel corro
all'inferno.

Sì, bel seno, che tu sei
Una neve animata,
Sì che tua giogia grata
Consola gl'ardor miei.
Ma tanto alfin godei
Che grande a poco a poco
Fra le falde di gel provo il
mio foco.

Voi pur, bei crini, adoro,
Cari dolci legami,
Voi, preziosi stami
Del mio ricco tesoro.
Ma della selva d'oro
Se non mi fate un dono,
Fra le miniere d'or povero io
sono.

Beautiful Eyes

Beautiful eyes, you are
indeed
doors to paradise:
with a tease and a laugh
you take me to heaven.
But my heart burns so
fiercely
that my everlasting flame
causes me to run,
from the doors of heaven
to hell.

Beautiful breast, you are
living snow.
O how your graceful throat
feeds my passionate fire.
Yet so sublime is my delight,
that as it grows, little by little,
my fire burns amidst the
snow.

I adore you, beautiful hair,
dear sweet bindings,
precious threads
of my rich treasure.
But if you won't give me
some of that golden tangle,
I'm impoverished amid
these goldmines.

Francesco Cavalli (1602-1676)

Erme e solinghe cime
from *La Calisto*

Giovanni Faustini

Endimione

Recitativo
Erme, e solinghe cime,
Ch'al cerchio m'accostate
Delle luci adorate,
In voi di novo
imprime,
Contemplator segreto
Endimione l'orme.
Le variate
forme
Della stella d'argento
Lusingando, e baciando,
Di chiare notti tra i sereni orrori,
Sulla terra, e sui sassi i suoi
splendori.

Lonely, deserted
peaks

Endymion

Recitative
Lonely, deserted peaks,
you who bring me closer
to the moonlight I adore,
Endymion, gazing
unobserved,
walks among you
once again.
From the clear and
peaceful night sky,
the silvery moon,
ever waxing and waning,
caresses and kisses
the rocky ground with her
gleaming light.

<i>Aria</i> Lucidissima face Di Tessaglia le note Non sturbino i tuoi giri, e la tua pace.	<i>Aria</i> Most resplendent of stars, may no sound from Thessaly disrupt either your travels or your peace.
Dag'l'atlantici monti Traboccando le rote, Febo, del carro ardente, omai tramonti.	Let Phoebus now turn the wheels of his fiery chariot downwards and vanish behind the towering peaks.
Il mio lume nascente Illuminando il cielo Più bello a me si mostri, e risplendente.	As you rise, beloved moon, and light up the heavens, unveil yourself to me in all your fair radiance.
Astro mio vago, e caro A' tuoi raggi di gelo, Nel petto amante a nutrir fiamme imparo.	Dear beauteous star of mine, at the touch of your icy beams I feel the flames build within my loving heart.

Biagio Marini (1594-1663)

Passacalio Op. 22 No. 25

Johann Christoph Bach (1642-1703)

Ach, dass ich Wassers gnug hätte

Liturgical text

O, that I had tears enough

Ach, dass ich Wassers gnug hätte in meinem Haupte, Und meine Augen Tränenquellen wären, Dass ich Tag und Nacht beweinen könnte meine Sünde! Meine Sünde gehe über mein Haupt, Wie eine schwere Last sind sie mir zu schwer worden, Darum weine ich so, Und meine beiden Augen fliessen mit Wasser. Meines Seufzens ist viel, und mein Herz ist betrübet, Denn der Herr hat mich voll Jammers gemacht Am Tage seines grimmigen Zorns.	O, that I had tears enough in my head and that my eyes were a fountain of tears that, day and night, I might lament my transgressions. For my sins are gone over my head, and are like a sore burden, too heavy for me to bear, therefore I do weep, the tears flowing from both my eyes. My sighing is great, and my heart is oppressed, for the Lord hath stricken me with anguish and woe in the day of his vengeance and wrath.
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Philipp Heinrich Erlebach (1657-1714)

Wer sich dem Himmel übergeben

Anonymous

Who surrenders to Heaven

Trocknet euch, ihr heissen Zähren, Augen, sucht euch aufzuklären, Seufzer, steigt nicht mehr empor! Denn die Sonne bricht hervor. Was mich bis hieher gedrückt, Furcht und Pein wird nun überwunden sein, Alles ist vorbei gerückt.	Dry your hot tears, try, O eyes, to be cheerful, sighs – no longer rise! For the sun now appears. What till now has oppressed me, fear and pain shall now be overcome, all is now past.
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Recht getan und gut Gewissen Ist ein sanftes Ruhekissen, Drauf die Unschuld Lager hält. Wohl, wer sich dies auch bestellt. Als denn lässt sich's freudig lachen, Ob der Neid Nebst der Falschheit dieser Zeit Gleich ein scheel Gesichte machen.	To have done what is right, with a clear conscience, is a soft pillow on which innocence lies. Happy he who has done this. One can now laugh with joy, even though envy and the deceit of this age Immediately grimace.
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Stillet euch, ihr heissen Zähren, Augen, sucht euch aufzuklären: Seufzer, was bewegt euch noch? Denn der Himmel liebt mich doch. Dem hab' ich mich überlassen, Dieser wacht, Und so kann bei düster Nacht Sich mein Herz auch mutig fassen.	Dry your hot tears, try, O eyes, to be cheerful: why do you still sigh? For Heaven loves me still. I have surrendered to Heaven, it watches over me, and thus can I in gloomy nights be courageous.
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Johann Philipp Krieger (1649-1725)

Adagio from Sonata a4 in F

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

Johann Christoph Bach

Es ist nun aus mit
meinem Leben

Now my life is ended

Anonymous

Es ist nun aus mit meinem Leben, Gott nimmt es hin, der es gegeben. Kein Tröpflein mehr ist in dem Fass, Es will kein Fünklein mehr verfangen, Des Lebens Licht ist ausgegangen. Kein Körnlein läuft mehr in dem Glas, Es ist nun aus, es ist vollbracht, Welt, gute Nacht!	Now my life is ended, God who gave it, takes it to him. Not the smallest drop remains in the vessel, no faint spark will now avail it, life's light is extinguished. Not the least grain of sand still runs through the glass, it is now ended, it is accomplished, world, good night!
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Was wollet ihr euch nach mir sehen? Ei, stillet, stillet eure Tränen, Weil meine schon gestillet sind, Mir wischt sie Jesus von den Augen, Was sollen denn die euren taugen, Und lachet mit mir als ein Kind. Was Jesus macht, ist wohlgemacht! Welt, gute Nacht!	Why would you grieve for me? Ah, ease your tears, for mine are eased already; Jesus wipes them from my eyes; what use then should yours be, laugh with me like a child. That which Jesus does is well done! World, good night!
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Interval

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Arise, my muse from

Arise, my muse Z320

Thomas D'Urfey

Arise, my muse, and to thy tuneful lyre
Compose a mighty ode
Whose charming nature may inspire
The bosom of some listening God
To consecrate thy bold attempting verse,
And Gloriana's fame disperse
O'er the wide confines of the universe.

'Tis Nature's Voice; thro' all the moving

Wood from *Hail, bright Cecilia* Z328

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.

John Blow (1649-1708)

Chaconne in G

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.

John Blow

Lovely Selina

Anonymous

Lovely Selina, innocent and free
From all the dangerous arts of love,
Thus in a melancholy grove
Enjoy'd the sweetness of her privacy.
Till envious gods, designing to undo her,
Depatch'd the swain not unlike to woo her.

It was not long e'er the design did take:
A gentle youth, born to persuade,
Deceiv'd the too, too easy maid.
Her scrip and garland she did forsake,
And rashly told the secrets of her heart,
Which the fond man would ever more impart.

False Florimel, joy of my heart, said she,
'Tis hard to love, and love in vain;
To love, and not be lov'd again.
And why should love and prudence disagree?
Pity ye pow'rs, that sit at ease above,
If e'er you know what 'tis to be in love!

Henry Purcell

Sonata in 4 Parts No. 6 in G minor Z807 'Chaconna'

Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin from *Te Deum and Jubilate* *Deo Z232*

Liturgical text

Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin.
O Lord, have mercy upon us.
O Lord, let thy mercy lighten upon us, as our trust is in
thee.
O Lord, in thee have I trusted, let me never be
confounded.

Fairest Isle from *King Arthur* Z628

John Dryden

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.