



**Lancaster
Singers**

‘Sumer is icumen in’

Music ranging from madrigals and early sacred music by Byrd, Lotti and others to sacred and secular music by Clara Schumann, Fauré, Villa-Lobos and more - including a new piece by renowned composer Bob Chilcott.

Conductor: Mavis Fletcher

Pianist: Ian Tate

Saturday 14th June 2014 at 7.30pm

Cartmel Priory

A wide range of composers and their music is represented in tonight's programme, beginning with some of the very earliest English settings and including Spanish, Russian, Italian, and German composers. Our programme concludes with a selection of English, French and American pieces.

Sumer is icumen in

This medieval English song is said to have been written at Reading Abbey in the mid 13th century. The manuscript is held by the British Library and the song is the oldest example of a 'round'.

In its simplest form a round consists of a brief melody divided into sections of equal length that serve as the point of entry for each voice. ('Three Blind Mice', dating from the 16th century, is a well-known example). In 'Sumer is icumen in' we have a fresh and dance-like tune, with instructions for singing as a round clearly marked on the manuscript according to the number of voices singing.

Each of the four voice-parts divides into 1st. and 2nd. The melody is different in each 'verse.' The early English words tell of the coming summer, with seeds growing and meadows blowing, bleating lambs, calving cows, happy bulls and everywhere the earth is being renewed. Above all this cacophony, the cuckoo sings merrily. Benjamin Britten featured this song (to be sung by a boys' choir) at the end of his Spring Symphony and it was also included in the opening ceremony of the Munich Olympic Games in 1972.

Quid petis, O fili?

Richard Pygott (1485-1552)

Pygott was Master of the Choristers in the household chapel of Cardinal Wolsey, a choir said to rival in quality the choir of the Chapel Royal. He became a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal after Wolsey's death. His compositions include a Mass and several antiphons which survive him, but he is best known for this exquisite carol.

There are three verses in early English with a Latin chorus between each verse. The Mother Mary is watching her little son on her lap, pondering his gentle sweetness, and playing a singing game with him. She asks:

Quid petis, O fili? *What seekest Thou, O my Son?*
Mater dulcissima ba ba. *The sweetest Mother kisses*
Quid petis, O fili? *What seekest Thou, O my Son?*
O pater, O fili, michi plausus osculada, da. *Clapping hands give me kisses.*
(Trans. Edith Ricker, *Ancient English Christmas Carols, 1400-1700*, Chatto and Windus)

In verse 3, Jesus is called 'Lantern of Light' and in verse 4, both God and the Lord Jesus appear; so perhaps Mary is acknowledging the divinity of her Son while singing to Him.

Sing we and chant it

Thomas Morley (1557-1602)

Morley followed a musical path from boyhood as a chorister in Norwich Cathedral. He was a versatile all-rounder, chiefly remembered today for his madrigals to English texts. He wrote a popular book of songs for voice and lute containing a setting of Shakespeare's 'It was a lover and his lass'.

Sing we and chant it while love doth grant it; not long youth lasteth, and old age hasteth; now is best leisure to take our pleasure. It is marked 'merrily'.

The Silver Swan

Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625)

Gibbons was another versatile composer who was born and christened in Oxford, sang in the choir of King's College, Cambridge, and died, aged 41, in Canterbury, where a monument to him can be seen in the Cathedral. His piano music was championed in the 20th century by the Canadian pianist, Glenn Gould. 'The Silver Swan' is the best known of his madrigals. It is a very beautiful, but restrained and wintry song, full of long, legato phrases. While she is alive, the Swan has 'no note,' but as death approaches she is able to 'sing', for the first and last time, as she says goodbye to life.

All creatures now are merry

John Bennet (c.1575-after 1614)

Nothing whatever is known about the life of John Bennet though his peers rated his work highly and connoisseurs of madrigals today endorse this judgement. He may have been a singer or chorus master in the City of London. He composed masses and motets and helped to define the character of English church music. He seems to have had a cheerful temperament if we go by this piece, which is marked 'eagerly' and has a bright tone. *All creatures are merry because they bask in the Queen's presence. Birds and flowers respond to her; the shepherds and nymphs sing to her: 'Long live fair Oriana'.*

We now move on to three sacred pieces.

Ave Verum Corpus

William Byrd (1542/3-1623)

Another English composer, probably born in Lincoln, who studied under Thomas Tallis and later became joint organist with Tallis in the Chapel Royal. He wrote church music, secular choral music and was a founder of the English Madrigal School. His personal religious beliefs, however, conflicted with the prevailing Anglicanism at Court and it is likely that he remained a practising Catholic throughout his life. He evaded persecution purely on account of his acknowledged excellence as a composer.

Ave Verum Corpus (Hail, true body) is a Latin hymn of late medieval origin. It is an affirmation of the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist, often set to music after the Reformation.

*All hail, O true body of the blessed Virgin born,
Which in anguish to redeem us didst suffer upon the cross;*

*From whose side, when pierced by a spear, there came forth both water and blood:
Be to us at our last hour the source of consolation.
O loving, O holy Jesu, thou Son of Mary,
O have mercy on me. Amen.*

Ave Verum Corpus

W. A. Mozart (1756-1791)

Mozart, the Austrian composer born in Salzburg, was also a Catholic and would have been very familiar with the words of this hymn. The same words translated by John Rutter give us:

*Jesus, Saviour, we behold Thee,
Mary's Son in bread and wine revealed;
Born and suffered, for us offered,
Thy cross all our wounds hath healed.*

Whether sung in Latin or English, the words tell of the symbolism of the Last Supper, when Christ broke bread and drank wine, telling the disciples 'This is my body and blood. Remember me as often as you eat the bread and drink the wine.' Mozart died at the early age of 35 and this music was written in the last year of his life, along with one of his best-loved operas, 'The Magic Flute' and his 'Requiem'.

Crucifixus

Antonio Lotti (1667-1740)

Here we have an Italian composer, who may have been born in Hanover, where his father was Kapellmeister. He studied in Venice, however, joining the choir of St. Mark's and holding several posts as organist. He wrote many operas and was one of few composers to be equally successful in opera and contrapuntal sacred music. 'Crucifixus' (Christ was crucified) sets words from the Nicene Creed. The choir is divided into 8 voices.

Christ was crucified for our salvation. He suffered under Pontius Pilate. How bitter the pains He bore; He gave up His spirit and was laid to rest. The English version is by John Rutter.



We now have a change of mood while our accompanist, Ian Tate, plays two *Romances* by Clara Schumann:

Op. 11 no.1, Andante

Op. 21 no.2, Allegretto

The German pianist/composer Clara Wieck wrote three *Romances for Piano* (Op. 11) in 1839, a time of personal difficulty and conflict between her love for Robert Schumann and her objecting father, resulting in a legal petition to marry. In the lyrical *Romance No 1* the florid major key of

the central section is framed by the sombre beauty of a theme in E flat minor. The set is dedicated to her future husband.

By June 1853 Clara was enjoying a happier period of composing at the Schumann household in Dusseldorf. The Op. 21 *Romances* - considered among her finest compositions - are influenced by and dedicated to the young Brahms, who had visited and begun his lasting friendship with both Clara and Robert. The short 2nd *Romance in F major* employs a cheery 'pizzicato' chordal style and an assured sense of harmonic structure.

These piano pieces are followed by a group of settings, by different composers, of *Ave Maria* - (Hail, Mary). This prayer consists partly of the biblical salutations of the Archangel Gabriel and Elizabeth to the Virgin Mary (Luke1: 28.and 42) and partly text added in the 15th century Roman Catholic Church. It is used in the liturgy of Eastern and Western churches and has been set by many composers. Eastern orthodox words, sung at the dismissal of Vespers, are set in Russian by Rachmaninov; it uses two salutations *Virgin Mother of God with for you have borne the Saviour of our souls.*

Ave Maria

Clara Schumann (1819-1896)

Clara Schumann was the daughter of a piano teacher (Friedrich Wieck) and a professional singer and pianist (Marianne Wieck.) Her parents were divorced when she was 6 but her father gave her a musical education. He was keen to profit from Clara's ability but he was also very encouraging and her childhood tours made her famous throughout Europe. As described above, her relationship with Robert Schumann was complicated but she eventually married him, after her father had taken them both to court. After her husband's death, Clara resumed her performing career and was highly acclaimed, especially in England. With Liszt, she became a leading piano teacher of her day. Her compositions are mainly of piano pieces and songs though she also wrote a piano concerto and a piano trio.

Her setting of *Ave Maria* is for 4 voices and is sung in German.

Ave Maria

Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959)

This Brazilian composer had his first music lessons from his father and some harmony lessons in 1907, but was otherwise self taught and earned a living playing in cafes and busking. He later played the 'cello in the Rio Opera where he absorbed the influences of Stravinsky and Strauss; then later he was sent to Paris by the Brazilian government, where he was influenced by Satie and Milhaud. Leopold Stokowski promoted his compositions tirelessly from the early 1940s.

Villa-Lobos's setting of the *Ave Maria* is a tranquil and beautiful Adagio, with an unexpected key change towards the end.

Ave Maris Stella

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

(*'Hail, star of the sea'* or *'Hail, bright star of heaven'*) is a Roman Catholic hymn sung to several different melodies in that church.

Grieg is Norway's foremost composer. He studied in Leipzig and heard Clara Schumann play her husband's Piano Concerto in A minor. Grieg's composing style evokes the essence of his nation, yet only his music for Ibsen's play *Peer Gynt* quotes music directly. His awareness of the musical language of Norway deepened as he grew older and it has been suggested that his *Norwegian Dances* (1902) have a flavour of Bartok. This setting of *Ave Maris Stella* is very much in the spirit of his native country. It is sung in Latin.

Bogoroditsye Dyevo (Ave Maria)

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

A Russian composer and pianist, Rachmaninov experienced the musician's equivalent of 'writer's block' in 1899, after a disastrous performance of his 1st Symphony. He withdrew the work, which was never again played in his lifetime. After his 2nd Piano Concerto was received very favourably, however, his compositions began to flow fluently.

He conducted, played and composed his music both in Russia which he left forever in 1917, and in America which he made his base. He wrote a great number of symphonic works and much piano and choral music, including songs, opera and his choral symphony *The Bells*. His *Ave Maria* is sung in Russian and begins *Hail, O Virgin Mother full of grace, the Lord is with you*. It is marked 'peacefully; not fast'.

There will be a short interval at this point

Cantique de Jean Racine

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

A French composer and organist, Fauré studied in Paris under Niedermeyer and Saint-Saens. His own pupils included Ravel, Boulanger and Enesco. His music was slow to gain recognition outside France but he is now considered one of the greatest of French composers, a master of the song-cycle, a 'poet of the keyboard' and a profound composer of chamber music. His best known work is the *Requiem*, but this did not gain general popularity until after the Second World War. The *Cantique* (canticle or hymn), written in 1865, was Fauré's graduation piece and won him 1st prize in composition. It is a beautifully melodic song, setting the French words of Jean Racine, with a harp-like, legato accompaniment by the piano. The overall theme is one of petition to God to hear the prayer of His people and to inspire them by the power of the Holy Spirit. *'May hell may flee before the might of God's word and may His laws may be remembered forever'*. The final lines ask for forgiveness and that the prayers of men may be to the glory of God. It ends very peacefully.

Panis Angelicus

César Franck (1822-90)

Franck toured his native Belgium from an early age as a pianist. He became a teacher and organist in Paris where his outstanding ability as an improviser drew listeners from far and wide. He wrote chamber music, operas and choral music, orchestral and organ music. The *Panis*

Angelicus (Bread of the Angel host), transcribed here by John Rutter from the original accompaniment for cello, harp and organ, tells us that the body of Christ - the broken bread of the Eucharist – is a sacrificial gift.

O Nata Lux

Morten Lauridsen (b. 1943)

The composer is a native of the Pacific NW and worked as a forest fire-fighter before going south to study composition at the University of Southern California, where he began teaching in 1967. In 2006 he was named 'American Choral Master' by the National Endowment for the Arts. In 2007 he received the National Medal of Arts from the President 'for his composition of radiant choral works combining musical beauty, power and spiritual depth'. Five of his more than 200 recordings have received Grammy awards, including *Lux Aeterna* (1997), of which *O Nata Lux* is the central movement. It is a serene *a capella* motet celebrating Christ the Redeemer. It has a sonorous quality, whilst the final bars of music shimmer, mirage-like.

The Dark-eyed Sailor

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

Just as the Tide was Flowing

Vaughan Williams had piano and violin lessons from the age of 6, and would later learn to play the viola and organ. Song writing took up a large part of his life; in total he wrote over 150 songs. In 1953, the National Arts Foundation of America voted him the outstanding musician of that year, describing him as a 'Miltonian figure' and his music as 'full of splendour without tinsel'. He was a great collector of folk songs and firmly believed that English folk songs held the accumulated emotion of successive generations. 'There is in them, as it were, the spiritual life-blood of a people.'

His *Five English Folk Songs*, from which these two are taken, are 'freely arranged' for 4 voices. *The Dark Eyed Sailor* and *Just as the Tide was Flowing* have stirring narratives and a brisk tempo. They concern sailors (in both cases) who meet their lovers after misunderstandings and time spent apart from each other, but where all ends happily 'and the lambs did play and pleasant was the weather'!

Lay a Garland

Robert Pearsall (1795-1856)

Pearsall was an English composer born into a wealthy Quaker family in Bristol. He trained as a lawyer but turned to music when living in Germany from 1830-42. He mostly lived abroad, but revived the composition of madrigals in the style of the 16th century. He was one of England's most gifted amateur composers of this type of music; he also wrote instrumental and orchestral work. Much of his output remained unpublished until after his death, and even now, many pieces remain in manuscript. He is an unjustly neglected minor composer but his music certainly merits attention.

In part-songs, the melody, at its simplest, is harmonized by the lower voices. This madrigal (written in 1840) is distinguished from the part-song in that each voice has its own melody and

sings with its own 'shape'. The music is written for 8 voices, the words from a Beaumont and Fletcher play entitled *The Maid's Tragedy* (1608-11).

Lay a garland on her hearse of dismal yew. Maidens willow branches wear; say she died true. Her love was false but she was firm. Upon her buried body lie lightly, thou gentle earth.

The Blue Bird

Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924)

Moving towards the Edwardian era, we have a frequently sung and popular piece by Stanford, to words by Mary Coleridge. Stanford was an Irish composer, conductor, organist and teacher. He studied in England, at Cambridge, and in Leipzig and Berlin. He won a high reputation for music at Cambridge and gave first performances of music by Brahms. His love of Brahms is reflected in his own compositions, particularly his church music. Stanford's pupils included Vaughan Williams, Bliss, Howells, Ireland, Holst and Gurney. He was a Professor of Music at Cambridge University and conducted the London Bach Choir from 1885-1902. He was the conductor of several of the Leeds Triennial Festivals and was a prolific composer. His best work is to be found in his operas, choral music and songs rather than his orchestral and chamber music. He wrote two stirring groups of Henry Newbolt settings, *Songs of the Sea* (1904) and *Songs of the Fleet* (1910).

The Blue Bird paints an impressionistic picture of a flat calm lake, reflecting the blue of the sky and surrounding hills. Across the water came a bird 'whose wings were palest blue' and the bird's song describes the sky, blue above it and blue below, in the water's reflection. The bird's image was gone as quickly as it appeared, leaving 'the lake blue below the hill.' We hear the bird's voice (soprano) soar over the tranquil lake and the lower voices provide the stillness of the water.

The Lily and the Rose

Bob Chilcott (b. 1955)

In a Golden World

One of the premier composers and choral conductors in Britain today, Bob Chilcott was born in Plymouth and sang in the choir of King's College, Cambridge, both as a boy and as a University student. In 1985 he joined the King's Singers, singing Tenor for 12 years. He has been a composer since 1997.

He has conducted many distinguished choirs including the BBC Singers and in 2002 he was appointed their Principal Guest Conductor. He has conducted around the world in 23 countries and is involved with the National Youth Choir as well as with other educational projects for children. He has worked closely with the poet Charles Bennett and their collaboration 'Five Days that changed the World' was premiered in Worcester in 2013, at the International Festival for Young Singers. His music is published by OUP and there are many recordings available.

The Lily and the Rose is a setting of a medieval poem by an anonymous 16th century English writer. It also appears in the *New Oxford Book of English Verse* with the title 'The Bridal Morn'. The poem can be read in two ways: as a symbol of the Virgin Mary mourning the death of her son, where the 'the bell' refers to the sound of a bell signifying a death and 'the bailey' is a

synonym for a 'keep' – the place where a body might be buried. The more modern interpretation is concerned with the fear and excitement of a young girl on her wedding day, where 'bell' can also mean 'beautiful one'.

In a Golden World was inspired by lines of Elizabeth Jennings (1926-2001). Elizabeth was born in Boston, Lincolnshire, the daughter of a Chief Medical Officer. The family moved to Oxford when Elizabeth was 6 years old. She studied at St. Anne's College, Oxford and later became the Librarian of the City Library. Her first collection of poetry was published in 1953.

This song was composed by Bob Chilcott for Len and Mavis Fletcher to celebrate their Golden Wedding Anniversary in 2013. It was first performed on 24th August 2013 by *Commotio*, conducted by Matthew Berry, in the Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford. There is a gentle ebb and flow in the music and in the range for each voice, with unexpected and beautiful key changes adding to the richness of sound.

*Wisdom or music come in these small hours,
Their clarities combine and I allow myself to rest in their good powers.
I feel in touch with everything that's peace
And later on there will arrive with dawn a bold assurance and a synthesis
Of what waits for me not much further on.
But near enough to tell me faith is bold
And proves itself in all that has been done to me and for me, in a golden world.*

The Long Day Closes

Sir Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900)

Paul Hillier, writing in the introduction to his collection of *English Romantic Part Songs*, says 'Sullivan's music so far transcends the banality of Henry Chorley's poem as to create a minor masterpiece'. This could be said to be 'damning with faint praise' though Sullivan remains very well respected as a composer of many genres. He was a chorister at the Chapel Royal, a pupil of Goss and Sterndale Bennett and studied at the Leipzig Conservatoire. He wrote oratorios, music for ballets, incidental music to plays by Shakespeare, cantatas, symphonies and of course, collaborated with Gilbert to complete the 12 'Savoy Operas' which still enjoy huge popularity. He had a great gift for melody and made clever parodies of music by Handel, Verdi, Donizetti and Wagner.

Henry Chorley (1808-1872) was an influential writer of his time and wrote libretti for Sullivan and others. He was born near Billinge, Lancashire, of Quaker parents, but moved at a young age, with his widowed mother and siblings, to Liverpool. He was an English literary, music and art critic, as well as an editor and gossip columnist. He also wrote novels, drama, poetry and lyrics. *The Long Day Closes* is banal in the extreme but Sullivan has made it into a popular piece that is still often sung in programmes of song.

Thanks to Margaret Fancy for these programme notes.

Refreshments will be served at the end of the concert

Mavis Fletcher



Mavis Fletcher is a graduate of the Royal Manchester College of Music. She taught in schools in Lancashire both Primary and Secondary and also in Adult Education and at the University of Central Lancashire. She is an active church musician, organist and leader of choirs.

A Trustee of the Association of British Choral Directors, Mavis was Chair of the NW Region for many years and is still actively involved locally in arranging singing days, training and conducting courses and as administrator for the NW Children's Honour Choir working with composer Bob Chilcott.

Nationally she is involved in helping to plan the annual Convention for ABCD which attracts choirs and music leaders from all over the world.

For the last three years she has worked alongside Marco Fanti in directing the Lancaster Singers.

Ian Tate



Ian Tate joined the Lancaster Singers as accompanist in 2012. His experience in piano accompaniment began at school choir concerts, which led to busy student days playing for soloists and ensembles, firstly as an undergraduate at the University College of North Wales, Bangor, and then as a postgraduate accompanist at the Royal Northern College of Music.

His professional performing activities over 30 years, based in Manchester, have included duo and chamber ensembles with members of the Manchester orchestras, acclaimed contemporary music recordings with members of the RNCM and work in musical theatre. Local performances have included a woodwind and piano ensemble at the Sedbergh Festival and at Brantwood,

Coniston in 2004 and a violin and piano recital at Brantwood in 2009. Since 1999 he has been pianist to the Maia Singers, Stockport, giving regular performances around Greater Manchester and Cheshire.

His experience as a teacher over the same period has included performance to diploma and degree levels and lecturing in music at North West institutions of Further and Higher Education, including the University of Central Lancashire.

Beyond music his activities include many years involvement with groups and local authorities in developing and encouraging cycling around Greater Manchester, and more recent work with a local Sustainable Living group.

Lancaster Singers would like to express thanks to the staff of Cartmel Priory for their help with this concert, and their appreciation for the services of the Lancashire County Library in providing music. Thanks also to our rehearsal accompanist Ian Tate.



LANCASTER SINGERS

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Lancaster Singers

2014-15 SEASON

haffner orchestra



Lancaster
Singers

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Haydn	Mass in Time of War
Brahms	Song of Destiny
Brahms	Nänie (<i>Song of Lamentation</i>)
Brahms	How beautiful are thy dwellings (<i>from the Requiem</i>)

16 and 19 December 2014 Christmas music in the Ashton Memorial

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13 and 14 June 2015 Summer concerts

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6.30pm pre-concert talk by Marianne Thorsen

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Berlioz	Overture to King Lear
Mozart	Violin Concerto no.4
Brahms	Symphony no.2

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Priory Church, Lancaster

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