

# Music for a Summer's Day

## Nantwich Singers

Ian Crawford - Director

John Gough - Accompanist



Music old and young  
by Morley, Gibbons,  
Bennett, Casulana,  
Stanford, Pearsall,  
Whitacre, Chilcott



## Music for a Summer's Day

*Sing we and chant it*

Thomas Morley

*Sing we and chant it*

Bob Chilcott

*Morir no può 'l mio cor*

Maddalena Casulana

*Weep, O mine eyes*

John Bennett

*Weep, O mine eyes*

Bob Chilcott

*The Bluebird*

Charles Villiers

Stanford

*The seal lullaby*

Eric Whitacre

*My soul is awakened*

Cristi Cary Miller

*The learned poets*

Orlando Gibbons

*The learned poets*

Bob Chilcott

*Lay a garland*

Robert Lucas Pearsall

*Fyer, fyer!*

Thomas Morley

*Fire, fire!*

Bob Chilcott

At the centre of our programme this summer are four madrigals, each in two settings and from two different centuries. Setting them side by side like this is rather a fun way of finding a fresh perspective and appreciation for the detail and subtleties of both. The four seventeenth-century madrigals are by Thomas Morley (2), Orlando Gibbons and John Bennet, and the twenty-first-century versions of these same madrigals are by the redoubtable Bob Chilcott.

Madrigals are usually concerned in one way or another with romantic love. They also frequently include a dancing 'fa-la-la' refrain, regardless of whether the mood is comic or tragic. Historically the madrigal *per se* enjoyed a relatively brief period of popularity, firstly in Italy and then more widely through Europe and especially England, but its legacy has made itself felt ever since, and composers have often revisited the styles of madrigals, or re-imagined them in contemporary forms, as we shall demonstrate in today's programme.

Bob Chilcott is a very familiar name to appear on our programmes because of his extensive range of choral works and the variety of style he explores. In these four *Little Jazz Madrigals* (2022) he sets out his stall in their very title: we are to hear jazz, not seventeenth-century century polyphony. But the link is - at least primarily - the words.

Morley's "Fyer, fyer!" is an example of the extended metaphor of fire consuming the hapless lover as his love does, and calling in vain for it to be somehow quenched. Despite this desperate situation, he manages to include some very jolly 'fa-la-las' as well. The same composer's

“Sing we and chant it” is a straightforward invitation to enjoy love’s delights ‘while youth lasteth’, with, of course its own helping of ‘fa-la-las’. The Gibbons (“Learned Poets”) is somewhat different in mood, and interestingly uses the madrigal form to deplore the flighty carelessness of the madrigal itself. Gibbons asks why the ‘learned poets’ do not turn their art toward ‘some better subject’ than lovesickness. John Bennet’s “Weep, O mine eyes” is direct and intensely poignant. No ‘fa-la-las’ in this one.

**Thomas Morley** (1557-1602)

*Sing we and chant it*

**Bob Chilcott** (b.1955)

According to Philip Brett, Morley was “chiefly responsible for grafting the Italian shoot on to the native stock and initiating the curiously brief but brilliant flowering of the madrigal that constitutes one of the most colourful episodes in the history of English music” (in *Oxford Music Online* 2016). Certainly Morley composed an engaging range of madrigals familiar to singers, and we include two lively examples here. Most often Morley wrote the words as well as the music as was frequently the case, especially in the English madrigal tradition. We begin with Morley’s delightful hymn to living in the moment. “Sing we and chant it” epitomises the essence of dancing, and a perfect marriage of music and words to express the joy of life and love, and a philosophy of *carpe diem*. Chilcott effortlessly picks up the baton with his jazz waltz version.

*Sing we and chant it* (Morley)

Sing we and chant it while love doth grant it.

Fa la la la la la.

Not long youth lasteth, and old age hasteth.

Now is best leisure to take our pleasure.

Fa la la la la la.

All things invite us now to delight us,

Fa la la la la la.

Hence, care, be packing! No mirth be lacking!  
Let spare no treasure to live in pleasure.  
Fa la la la la la.

**Maddalena Casulana** (c.1544-c.1590)      *Morir non può 'l mio core*

Italy is represented by the remarkable Maddalena Casulana (some of whose sacred work we have sung before). Casulana was probably the first woman in western music to publish books entirely of her own work (*Il Primo Libro di Madrigali*, 1568), and she was very highly regarded in her time. As so frequently happened to female artists of all disciplines, however, her music was mislaid and forgotten for centuries. BBC Radio 3 broadcast a performance of a set of her published madrigals in 2022, the first performance for 400 hundred years. In the madrigal we sing today Casulana pulls no punches in the raw and passionate declamation of desperate, unrequited love. The harmonic crunches and piercing chromaticism add a distinctive and vivid emotional colour. For the English sensibility the words of “Morir non può” may seem somewhat florid, not to say melodramatic, but we are singing them in Italian which miraculously means it all makes perfect sense. Definitely no ‘Fa-la-las’ though.

Casulana’s first book of madrigals was dedicated to her patron Isabella de’ Medici, and includes this telling statement: “[I] want to show the world, as much as I can in this profession of music, the vain error of men that they alone possess the gifts of intellect and artistry, and that such gifts are never given to women.”

*Morir non può 'l mio core* (1566)

My heart cannot die:  
To please you, I want to kill it,  
But it can’t be ripped from your breast  
Where it has lived so long;  
If I were to kill it - as I want to -  
I know my death would be your death too.

**John Bennet** (c.1575-after 1614)

*Weep O mine eyes* (1599)

**Bob Chilcott** (b.1955)

John Bennet's exquisite miniature is surely among the most beloved of the genre, with not a single word wasted. It is a great pity that so little is known about the composer of this little gem. Written as a homage to the renowned John Dowland, it references Dowland's own "Flow My Tears", although perhaps Bennet's most significant influence in madrigal writing was Thomas Morley.

Bennet published a book of madrigals with the wonderful title *These First Fruits of My Simple Skill the Endeavours of a Young Wit* in 1599, and dedicated it to Ralph Assheton, a prominent figure in the north west of England. Bennet himself was possibly born in Cheshire in around 1575, and was known to be still living in 1614, but the trail goes cold after that, at least for now.

Chilcott reinterprets the madrigal as a ballad, rich with harmonic dissonance supporting the yearning melody. The bass alternates throughout between F sharp and F natural, creating the sense of a repeating loop of sadness, only finally resolving on E in the final chromatic arpeggio.

*Weep, O mine eyes* (Bennet)

Weep, O mine eyes, and cease not,

Alas, these your spring tides, methinks, increase not.

O when begin you

To swell so high that I may drown me in you?

**Charles Villiers Stanford** (1852-1924)

*The Bluebird*

We make no apology for including this choral favourite in a summer programme. It is a gift to any choir lucky enough to have in its ranks a silver-voiced soprano - and we have not one, not two, but three, and that's just the first sopranos! Mary Coleridge's gorgeous and

shimmering meditation on the restorative power of nature is given an almost minimalist treatment by Stanford. The lower voices' sustained harmonies seem to hang in the air like a heat haze, while the almost unearthly soprano line soars above as if suspended in time.

*The Bluebird* (Mary Coleridge, 1897)

The lake lay blue below the hill,  
O'er it, as I looked, there flew  
Across the waters, cold and still,  
A bird, whose wings were palest blue.  
The sky above was blue at last,  
The sky beneath me, blue in blue,  
A moment, ere the bird had passed,  
It caught his image as he flew.

**Eric Whitacre** (b.1970)

*The Seal Lullaby*

This gentle and atmospheric lullaby could easily form a soundtrack to a classic Disney film, accompanying soft rolling seas and a mother and baby seal swimming peacefully together. Indeed, it came about when Whitacre was invited to provide the soundtrack for an animated film of Rudyard Kipling's short story *The White Seal*, although in the end nothing came of it (apparently the studio opted to go for *Kung-Fu Panda* instead on that occasion). The story, from which the lullaby comes, is the only one of *The Jungle Book* stories not set in India. Appropriately for a lullaby, Whitacre exploits his melody writing skills rather than his characteristic building up of harmonic structures, familiar in many of his works. We are invited to imagine the mother seal singing to soothe and reassure her flipperling, with the lilting piano accompaniment conjuring up a vision of the 'slow swinging seas'.

*Seal Lullaby* (Rudyard Kipling, 1893)

Oh! Hush thee, my baby, the night is behind us,  
And black are the waters that sparkled so green.  
The moon o'er the combers looks downward to find us  
At rest in the hollows that rustle between.

Where billow meets billow, there soft be thy pillow;  
Ah, weary wee flipperling curl at thy ease!  
The storm shall not wake thee, nor shark overtake thee,  
Asleep in the arms of the slow-swinging seas.

**Cristi Cary Miller**

*My soul is awakened*

Cristi Cary Miller is an American composer and educator, specialising in choral music. This setting of Anne Brontë's wonderfully atmospheric short poem is for upper voices and piano. The brisk, lilting rhythmic patterns in the melody capture the swell and surge of both the breeze that the poet is experiencing, and the sea that she is imagining.

*My soul is awakened* (Anne Brontë, 1846)

My soul is awakened, my spirit is soaring,  
And carried aloft on the wings of the breeze;  
For, above, and around me, the wild wind is roaring  
Arousing to rapture the earth and the seas.

The long withered grass in the sunshine is glancing,  
The bare trees are tossing their branches on high;  
The dead leaves beneath them are merrily dancing,  
The white clouds are scudding across the blue sky.

I wish I could see how the ocean is lashing  
The foam of its billows to whirlwinds of spray,  
I wish I could see how its proud waves are dashing  
And hear the wild roar of their thunder today!

**Orlando Gibbons** (1583-1625)  
(1612?)

*O, that the learned poets*

**Bob Chilcott** (b.1955)

Orlando Gibbons's career was successful, even illustrious, by any standards, although his life was cut tragically short. He was born in Oxford, lived in Cambridge and moved to London, where he was a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal, junior chapel organist, and later



organist at Westminster Abbey. He was considered the foremost keyboard player of his time as well as being a singer. He wrote primarily sacred music although he also ventured in the secular, as in his celebrated “The Silver Swan”, and again here in this five-part madrigal. The words seem like a rather stern admonition against the typical frivolity of the madrigal form, setting the sacred against the secular, but the mood of the music is quite other. Lively quaver runs and little syncopations season the polyphony and only in the last line does the mood soften, with note values increasing gently as if the froth of bubbles on a glass of champagne were gradually settling into golden gloriousness, as we contemplate Gibbons’s longed-for ‘heavenly strings’. Chilcott gives this a truly sardonic flavour with the “bossa nova feel” direction at the beginning, and the repetitive syncopated rhythmic accompaniment pushing forward all the time. He sustains this throughout - well, a bossa nova is a dance, after all, so sudden changes of rhythm could trip the dancers up.

*The Learned Poets* (Gibbons)

O, that the learned poets of this time  
Who in a lovesick line can so well speak  
Would not consume good wit in hateful rhyme  
But with deep care some better subject find.  
For if their music please in earthly things,  
How would it sound if strung with heavenly strings?

**Robert Lucas Pearsall** (1795-1856)

*Lay a garland*

Pearsall’s majestic arrangement of “In Dulci Jubilo” is a great Christmas season favourite, and “Lay a Garland” offers Pearsall in a dramatically different mood, but with comparable majesty of gesture.

In this elegy from *The Maid’s Tragedy* (Beaumont and Fletcher, 1619), Aspasia has died tragically. She has been true to her lover, but he has been ‘false’ (having been forced into a marriage against his will).

There's rather more to the scenario than that, of course, but this single moment of meditation on tragic death is presented by Pearsall in a beautifully rich and complex interweaving of eight parts, which creates a tapestry of sound and colour and mood the like of which the Lady of Shalott might have been weaving herself when she caught that fateful glimpse of Sir Lancelot in the mirror.

*Lay a garland (1840)* (Beaumont and Fletcher, 1619)

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.

**Thomas Morley** (1557-1602)

*Fyer, Fyer*

**Bob Chilcott** (b.1955)

Morley's "Fyer, fyer!" begins with an urgent, declamatory call in homophonic, rather than polyphonic, style. Very quickly, however, the parts begin to scatter and the 'fa-la-las' ripple through the texture like the flames of the fire. The 'Ay me! Ay me!' which recurs intermittently brings a moment's calm, before the poet's despair at finding succour rises up again in anguish - only to disperse in frivolous 'fa-la-las' almost immediately. No real cause for alarm, then.

Chilcott's reimagining has the direction "urgent, rolling tempo", and the clarion calls of 'Fire, fire!' are strongly articulated in a syncopated rhythm and roughly in minor key, although, this being Chilcott, small details such as 'key' can be very flexible. In this instance, the sense of minor tonality is seasoned with chromatic additions, and when the 'Fa-la-las' begin, the move to a cheerful major tonality is especially delightful.

*Fyer, Fyer!* (Morley)

Fyer, fyer! Fyer, fyer! Fyer, fyer! My hart!

Fa la la la la la.

O help, alas, O help!

Ay me! I sit and cry me and call for help, alas, but none comes ny me.

Fa la la la la la.  
I burne, I burne mee, alas, I burne!  
Will none come quench me?  
O cast water on, alas, and drench mee.  
Fa la la la la la.

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### **The Nantwich Singers**

Musical Director: Ian Crawford

Accompanist: John Gough

#### *Soprano*

Annabel Nielsen

Lyn Bright

Becky Daniels

Jane Riddle

Barbara Arch

Katy Robinson

#### *Alto*

Vanessa Layfield

Alison Hendricken

Rachel Duerden

Anne-Marie Naylor

Glynis Brewer

#### *Tenor*

Liam Tyler-Murphy

William Hall

John Duthie

#### *Bass*

David Guest

Jonathan Layfield

Quentin Duerden

Steve Brewer

David Burrowes

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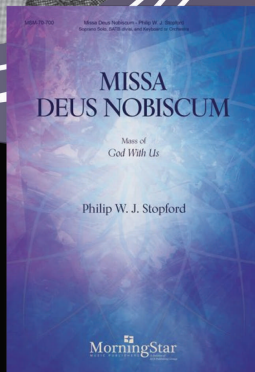
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