

A Little Night Music

from the Nantwich Singers

illuminating a journey from dusk to dawn

Saturday 16th March 2024
St Mary's Church, Nantwich



A Little Night Music

The Nantwich Singers

Musical Director: Ian Crawford

Piano: John Gough

Programme

Dusk

The Long Day Closes Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900)

Nunc Dimittis William Byrd (1540-1623)

The Lake at Evening Charles Giffes (1884-1920)
(piano solo)

Night has fallen

O Schöne Nacht Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

A troubled sleep

O Sonno Cipriano de Rore (1515-1565)

The Vale of Dreams Charles Giffes
(piano solo)

Night György Ligeti (1923-2006)

Deep in the Night Jussi Chydenius (b.1972)

The Night sky

O Oriens

Cecilia McDowall (b.1951)

Skywalk

Steve Martland (1954-2013)

The Night Winds

Charles Giffes

(piano solo)

Underneath the Stars

Kate Rusby (b.1973)

Night music

Nocturnes:

Morten Lauridsen (b.1943)

Sa nuit d'été

Soneto de la noche

Sure on this shining night

Epilogue - Voici le soir

Sleeping peacefully

Only in Sleep

Eriks Ešenvalds (b.1977)

Dawn

O Radiant Dawn

James MacMillan (b.1959)

We begin our programme with a gentle ending, and close it with a radiant new beginning. In between, we visit the night hours from dusk until dawn, and the varying moods, dreams, fears and fantasies of the long dark hours.

Evening: Dusk

The Long Day Closes Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900)

Before becoming one half of the celebrated duo of Gilbert and Sullivan, Arthur Sullivan had carved out a career for himself, composing, teaching (which he did not enjoy) and arranging vocal scores of popular operas. This is one of his part-songs, a collaboration with poet Henry Fothergill Chorley, published in 1868. Its deceptive simplicity conceals a deeply affecting directness. Sullivan's gift for singing melody and harmonic progression finds intense expressiveness with nothing redundant.

*No star is o'er the lake, its pale watch keeping,
The moon is half awake, through grey mist creeping.
The last red leaves fall round the porch of roses,
The clock hath ceased to sound, the long day closes.*

*Sit by the silent hearth in calm endeavour,
To count the sounds of mirth, now dumb for ever.
Heed not how hope believes and fate disposes,
Shadow is round the eaves, the long day closes.*

*The lightened windows dim are fading slowly,
The fire that was so trim now quivers lowly.
Go to the dreamless bed where grief reposes,
Thy book of life is read, the long day closes.*

(Henry Fothergill Chorley, 1808-1872)

Nunc Dimittis

William Byrd (1540-1623)

In the same poetic landscape, but drawing on the familiar story of Simeon in St Luke's Gospel, William Byrd's *Nunc Dimittis*, from his *Great Service* is at the same time both streamlined and voluptuous. A different era, a different musical style, but the same directness of feeling is evident, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation" - I am fulfilled. The writing is rich and complex, while at the same time suggesting that nothing has been added to what is essential, embodying the sense of "givenness" or fulfilment that Simeon experiences.

The *Great Service* comprises music for Matins, Communion and Evensong, and the *Nunc Dimittis* is the final canticle of Evensong. The text has been in use in Christian services since the fourth century.

Despite his life-long connection to Roman Catholicism which brought him fines for non-attendance at Anglican services from time to time, Byrd still managed also to embrace the Protestant tradition and to produce glorious music for services, albeit sometimes perhaps pushing the bounds of Puritan restraint further than some would have deemed acceptable.

A near-contemporary of Byrd had this to say (not a trace of English exceptionalism here, I'm sure):

"For Motets and musick of piety and devotion, as well as for the honour of our Nation, as the merit of the man, I prefer above all our Phoenix M[aster] William Byrd, whom in that kind, I know not whether any may equall, I am sure none excel, even by the judgement of France and Italy, who are very sparing in the commendation of strangers, in regard of that conceipt they hold of themselves." (Henry Peacham (1576–1643), quoted in Boyd, 1962)

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word.

*For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
To be a light to lighten the Gentiles and to be the glory of thy people Israel.*

The Lake at Evening Charles Giffes (1884-1920) (piano solo)

When the American composer Charles Tomlinson Griffes died at the early age of 35 in 1920, he was just establishing a fine reputation and career for himself. Following a short period of study in Germany, he returned to America writing in an Impressionist style but with an American accent. He had an extensive knowledge of poetry, and each of the three Tone Poems (Op.5) is prefaced with a few lines of poetry.

The Lake at Evening (1910)... for always..I hear a lake lapping with low sounds by the shore . (W B Yeats.)

Night has Fallen

O Schöne Nacht Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

The mood shifts as night falls, and Brahms introduces a warm romantic dimension; somehow he manages to include references to the moon, nightingales and love without sentimentality. I have heard an argument that German poetry, such as this by G F Daumer, does not always succeed in English translation, the British taste being perhaps more inclined to understatement than to sentiment. Be that as it may, the marriage of German text and music here is perfectly balanced and Brahms's wonderful piano

writing, characteristically rich with resonant bass, rhythmic patterns of syncopation and hemiola, amplifies the relatively simple vocal melodic lines. The piano sets the lyrical mood with a gentle *arpeggio* introduction, suggesting soft moonlight and quiet breezes. The main melody is given first to the bass line, rich and sonorous although still quiet, with the other parts gradually joining. The arrival of the nightingale is heralded by much livelier and virtuoso rippling *arpeggio* figures in the piano and a more sprightly variation on the melody in the soprano line, *forte*, for a brief moment. The young lover's entry is initially diffident and soft under cover of the nightingale's ardent song, but joy in the beautiful night bursts out again as the song draws to a close, rising and then gently falling into silence at the end.

*O schöne Nacht
am Himmel märchenhaft erglänzt der Mond in seiner ganzen
pracht;*

Um ihn der kleinen Sterne liebliche Genossenschaft.

*O schöne Nacht
Es schimmert hell der Tau am grünen Halm;
Mit Macht im Fliederbusche schlägt die Nachtigall.
Der Knabe schleicht zu seiner Liebsten sacht.*

O schöne Nacht!

*Oh beautiful night!
The moon is fabulously shining in its complete splendour in the sky;
Around it, sweet company of little stars.*

*Oh beautiful night!
The dew is shimmering brightly on the green blades of grass;
The nightingale sings ardently in the lilac bush, and
The boy steals softly to his lover.*

Oh beautiful night! (Georg Friedrich Daumer 1800-1875)

A Troubled Sleep

O Sonno

Cipriano de Rore (1515-1565)

Cipriano de Rore was a Franco-Flemish composer of the Renaissance who spent a significant amount of time working in Italy. He is seen as a seminal influence on madrigal composers coming after him. Here, de Rore's nuanced chromaticism and weaving polyphony ripple the erstwhile calm surface of the night with troubled thoughts and anxieties, which sleep alone (*"afflicted mortals' comfort"*) can assuage. We hear this for example in the sopranos' descending melody on *"oblio dolce de' mali si grave"* (*"sweet oblivion of ills so grave"*) which, supported by the underneath parts, resolves on a D major chord of hope. *"Ov'è'l silentio?"* (*"Where is the silence?"*) introduces a transient change of meter, scarcely discernible but it seems to suggest a pause in movement or thought before returning to the original meter, with small running figures in parallel and contrary motion. A poignantly lovely descending phrase follows, on *"these gloomy and cold shadows in vain I entice"* before the final, slow and resigned *"O plumes with harshness filled, O hard and painful nights"*.

*O sonno, o della queta, umida, ombrosa
notte placido figlio; o de mortali
egri conforto, oblio dolce de mali
si gravi, ond' è la vita aspra e noiosa;*

*soccorri al cor omai, che langu e posa
non have, e queste membra stanch e frali
solleva: a me ten vola, o sonno, e l ali
tue brune sopra me distendi e posa.*

*Ov'è 'l silentio che l dì fugge e l lume?
E i lievi sogni, che con non secure
vestigia di seguirti han per costume?*

*Lasso, ch invan te chiamo, e queste oscure
e gelide ombre invan lusingo. O piume
d asprezza colme! O notti acerb e dure!*

*O sleep, O that quiet child of peaceful,
fresh and shadowy night; O afflicted mortals'
comfort; sweet oblivion of ills
so grave they make life harsh and tedious,*

*give succour to my heart that, now waning and restless, languishes
and raise these frail and weary limbs.
Envelop me, O sleep, and spread
your dark wings over me.*

*Where is the silence which the day flees
and the light and gentle dreams
which leave no certain trace?*

*Alas in vain I call you, and these gloomy
and cold shadows in vain I entice: O plumes
with harshness filled, O hard and painful nights.
(Giovanni della Casa, 1503-1556)*

The Vale of Dreams

Charles Giffes (*piano solo*)

*The Vale of Dreams (1912) At midnight in the month of June, I
stand beneath the mystic moon, an opiate vapour, dewy, dim,
exhales from out her golden rim . (Edgar Allan Poe.)*

Night (Éjszaka)

György Ligeti (1923-2006)

Ligeti's *œuvre* is characterised by constant experimentation, openness to everything and a refusal to be tied down to existing forms and structures, including his own. *Night* was composed as one part of a duo (the other being entitled *Morning*) in 1955 while he was still in Hungary. It was not performed until 1968 in Stockholm, Ligeti having left Budapest for Vienna after the Hungarian uprising of 1956. To many audience members his densely atmospheric and haunting music has become familiar through its use by Stanley Kubrick in a number of films, notably *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Eyes Wide Shut*; also as background music to the radio series of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. In *Night* the building up of apparently simple rhythmic and harmonic patterns or clusters through the voices belies a texture as rich and resonant as the mysteriousness of darkness. As Tom Service has said, "Ligeti's pieces are often short, even miniature, but it's as if that smallness of scale makes you aware of some gigantic vacuum around them."

*Rengete tövis, regnete csönd!
Én csöndem szivem dobogása.
Éjszaka.*

*Thorny huge jungles, mystery forests, infinite wilderness, still!
Boundless and endless and still!
Beats of my heart in endless silence.
Darkness. Night.
(After a poem by Sándor Weöres, 1913-1989, trans. György Ligeti)*

Deep in the Night

Jussi Chydenius (b.1972)

Jussi Chydenius offers a complete shift in style, with syncopated, driving rhythms, both urgent and yet relaxed and fluid. He is a Finnish musician and composer, bass singer, member of rock band Rajaton and the range of his musical experience is very evident in this piece. The basses begin with a percussive *ostinato* figure on “*Deep in the night, deep in the night*” like a drummer’s introduction, before the upper voices join and push the narrative on in close harmony, with a melody that is both vibrant and at the same time drenched in melancholy.

This is the first of two settings of poetry by the 19th century American poet, Sara Teasdale, that we include in this programme. Highly regarded in her lifetime (and winner of what was to become the Pulitzer Prize), Teasdale drew on “a woman’s changing perspectives on beauty, love, and death” (*The Poetry Foundation*). The lyrical shape of her writing led a critic to say, “Miss Teasdale is first, last, and always a singer” (*NY Times Book Review*, 1917). A later writer, noting the understated depth of her writing, said, “Simply stated thoughts are complex...and reverberate in the mind” (Overmyer, 1984).

*Deep in the night the cry of a swallow,
Under the stars he flew,
Keen as pain was his call to follow
Over the world to you.*

*Love in my heart is a cry forever
Lost as the swallow's flight,
Seeking for you and never, never
Stilled by the stars at night.*

(Sara Teasdale, 1884-1933)

The Night Sky

O Oriens

Cecilia McDowall (b.1951)

One of Britain's most celebrated living composers, McDowall's choral music ranges across both the sacred and the secular. In this piece McDowell creates a distinctive sound-world: complex harmonies are built up through the eight parts, and shift and change like the colours of the spectrum, conjuring an atmosphere of mystical contemplation. *O Oriens* begins with a clear, bell-like diatonic chord in E major which then begins to shift and blur, slowly revealing layers of harmony and colour, returning repeatedly to the original diatonic chord like a base or anchor. This, and the swelling and ebbing dynamic create a sense of movement, which could equally suggest the sea, cosmic space, or the human mind in meditation.

One of the seven *Advent 'O' Antiphons* (so-called because each begins with "O") this one is designated for December 21.

*O Oriens, splendor lucid aeternae, et sol justitiae:
Veni, et illumina
Sedentes in tenebris,
Et umbra mortis.*

*O Morning Star,
Splendour of light eternal, and sun of righteousness:
Come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness
And the shadow of death.*

Skywalk

Steve Martland (1954-2013)

This was first performed by our sister choir, the Nantwich Choral Society, under Stephen Buckman in 1989 in this very church. The work's publisher, Schott, writes: "an astronaut describes his feelings as he walks in space and looks at his planet, Earth, in all its beauty. Steve Martland sets the text to music that is weightless, luminous, incantatory."

Born in Liverpool, Martland's musical influences were wide-ranging, and are reflected in his idiosyncratic style. He was committed to transcending artificial boundaries of genre and class, and to the importance of education in music. He studied with Louis Andriessen, and other acknowledged influences on his work are Michael Tippett, Arvo Pärt, John Tavener and Philip Glass.

This mystical work offers an opportunity to shift our perspective from the subjective to the universal. Bell-like chimes for lower parts underpin the two-soprano counterpoint, which requires the sopranos to eschew *vibrato* and keep the tone pure and clear. The dynamic ebbs and flows, and "Everything is fine!" is frequently repeated, often *pianissimo*, in awe and wonder, perhaps.

*I see the horizon, a light blue, a blue band.
This is this is the earth, how beautiful she is!
Everything is fine!*

*I see a vision
Of divinity, God's earth, the scars of national boundaries gone!
Everything is fine!*

*Minerva breathes,
Apollo guides me,
A long way to go, just to check the view!
Everything is fine!*

*I am the eagle
On the rock and
Look! By holding up my thumb
I blot the earth from the Universe!
Everything is fine!*

*A single eye of blue
That gazed on space
Is changing to another hue
The Face itself looks on the Face
Unfolding time
The final gyre - gives out.
(Stevan Keane)*

The Night Winds Charles Giffes (piano solo)
The Night Winds (1911, and originally conceived as a song) *But
when the night had thrown her pall upon that spot, as upon all, and
the mystic wind went by murmuring in melody, then I would awake
to the terror of the lonely lake . (Edgar Allan Poe.)*

Underneath the Stars Kate Rusby (b.1973) (arr. Jim Clements)
Yorkshire-born folk-singer and composer Kate Rusby has charmed
listeners for many years now with her distinctively fresh and often
deeply poignant songs, frequently exploring the rich English folk
tradition, especially that pertaining to South Yorkshire. The structure
is strophic, with variations in mood from 'gently lilting' to 'more

angsty' and back again. The recurring motif of "your own free will" is subtly evoked in the fluid rhythmic patterns which shape the whole. This arrangement was made by Jim Clements for Voces8.

*O, go gently, O go gently
Underneath the stars I'll meet you
Underneath the stars I'll greet you
And there beneath the stars I'll leave you
Before you go of your own free will.*

*Go gently, go gently
Underneath the stars you met me
Underneath the stars you left me
I wonder if the stars regret me.
At least you'll go of your own free will;*

*Go gently, go gently
Here beneath the stars I'm landing,
And here beneath the stars not ending
Oh, why on earth am I pretending?
I'm here again, the stars befriending
They come and go of their own free will. Go gently, go gently.*

Night Music

Nocturnes Morten Lauridsen (b.1943)

Nocturnes is a group of songs on the theme of night and love. Through settings of poetry in by Rilke, Neruda and Agee in French, Spanish and English respectively, the night becomes a key player in these intimate dramas of love and loneliness. As is characteristic of Lauridsen's music, rich, romantic harmonies are offset by frequent sharp dissonances, like lemon juice on strawberries.

The first in the set, *Sa nuit d'été* begins with quite startling dissonances in the piano introduction, even though the mood is otherwise calm.

In *Soneto de la noche*, the contemplative mood continues and the enharmonic change shifts us into a different key and a different mood.

The more familiar *Sure on this shining night* follows, with its lush, indulgent harmonies and soaring melodies.

Finally the *Epilogue* reprises the first song, and takes us back to the sparse and edgy but gentle beginning. Lauridsen says, "I could not resist Rilke's beautiful little poem which is set against the rich, jazz-tinged modal harmonies and bell sounds which began the cycle and which now bring the *Nocturnes* to a quiet end as darkness arrives."

Lauridsen is an American composer with a rich *œuvre* of choral music: two of his most well-loved pieces have been sung by the Nantwich Singers on several occasions (*O Magnum Mysterium*, and *Sure on this Shining Night*, included in this set).

Sa nuit d'été

*Si je pourrais avec mes mains brûlantes
Fondre ton corps autour ton cœur d'amante
Ah que la nuit deviendrait transparente
Le prenant pour un astre attardé
Qui toujours dès le premier temps des mondes
Était perdu et qui commence sa ronde
Et tâtonnant de la lumière blonde
Sa première nuit, sa nuit, sa nuit d'été*

*If, with my burning hands, I could melt
The body surrounding your lover's heart,
Ah! How the night would become translucent,
Taking it for a late star,
Which, from the first moments of the world,
Was forever lost, and which begins its course
With its blonde light, trying to reach out towards
Its first light, its night, its summer night.
(Rainer Maria Rilke, 1875-1926, trans. Byron Adams)*

Soneto de la noche

*Cuando yo muero' quiero tus manos en mis ojos:
Quiero la luz y el trigo de tus manos amadas
Pasar una vez más sobre mí su frescura:
Sentir la suavidad que cambió mi destino.*

*Quiero que vivas mientras yo, dormido, te espero
Quiero que tus oídos sigan oyendo el viento
Que huelas el aroma del mar que amamos juntos
Y que sigas pisando la arena que pisamos.*

*Quiero que lo que amo siga vivo
Y a ti te amé y canté sobre todas las cosas,
Por eso sigue tú floreciendo, florida,*

*Para que alcances todo lo que mi amor te ordena,
Para que se pasee mi sombra por tu pelo,
Para que así conozcan la razón de mi canto.*

*When I die, I want your hands upon my eyes:
I want the light and the wheat of your beloved hands
To pass their freshness over me one more time:
I want to feel the gentleness that changed my destiny.*

*I want you to live while I wait for you, asleep,
I want your ears to still hear the wind,
I want you to smell the scent of the sea we both loved,
And to continue walking on the sand we walked on.*

*I want all that I love to keep on living,
And you whom I loved and sang above all things
To keep flowering into full bloom.*

*So that you can touch all that my love provides you,
So that my shadow may pass over your hair,
So that all may know the reason for my song.
(Pablo Neruda, 1904-1973, trans. Nicholas Lauridsen)*

*Sure on this shining night
Sure on this shining night
Of starmade shadows round
Kindness must watch for me
This side the ground*

*The late year lies down the north
All is healed, all is health
High summer holds the earth
Hearts all whole*

*Sure on this shining night
I weep for wonder
Wandering far alone
Of shadows on the stars.
(James Agee, 1909-1955)*

Epilogue - Voici le soir

Voici le soir;

Pendant tout un jour encore je vous ai beaucoup aimées,

Collines émues.

C'est beau de voir,

Mais: de sentire à la doublure des paupières fermées

La douceur d'avoir vu...

Night has come:

For one whole day I've loved you so much,

Stirring hills,

It's beautiful to see,

But: to feel in the lining of closed eyelids

The sweetness of having seen...

(Rainer Maria Rilke, 1875-1926, trans. Morten Lauridsen)

Sleeping Peacefully

Only in Sleep

Eriks Ešenvalds (b.1977)

Ešenvalds is a Latvian composer, chiefly of choral music. He says, "For me, harmony is most important - how it flows and becomes a new harmony", and this would seem to make him an ideal setter of this poem by Sara Teasdale. This is the second appearance of this poet in our programme, and here she meditates on memory and dreams, and how the past returns to us. In keeping with the theme of childhood, Ešenvalds captures a mood of gentle nostalgia in the lyrical melody which evokes songs and moods of childhood, infused with melancholy and the loneliness of night-time dreams. But the harmonies created by the underlying parts create the overall atmosphere, frequently splitting into eight parts and embodying the fluidity of dreams. Listen for the moments when a closed-lips

humming opens out into a vowel sound, like a moment of clarity in the haziness of the dream that Teasdale is contemplating. The long solo soprano cadenza at the end conjures free-flowing thoughts and memories.

Only in Sleep was composed in 2010 for the University of Louisville Collegiate Chorale and Cardinal Singers.

*Only in sleep I see their faces,
Children I played with when I was a child,
Louise comes back with her brown hair braided,
Annie with ringlets warm and wild.*

*Only in sleep Time is forgotten —
What may have come to them, who can know?
Yet we played last night as long ago,
And the doll-house stood at the turn of the stair.*

*The years had not sharpened their smooth round faces,
I met their eyes and found them mild —
Do they, too, dream of me, I wonder,
And for them am I too a child?
(Sara Teasdale, 1884-1933)*

Sunrise

O Radiant Dawn

James MacMillan (b.1959)

Another of Britain's most celebrated living composers, Sir James Macmillan brings an extraordinary range of mood and colour to his instrumental and choral music. These colours are manifest even in a miniature such as this *a capella* anthem. *O Radiant Dawn* (English translation of *O Oriens*) is one of the *Strathclyde Motets*; communion motets setting *Propers* of the mass for various Sundays and feasts. MacMillan extends through the full vocal and dynamic range available, creating a magnificently rich and sonorous soundscape which seems to embody both human frailty and human aspiration. And so we bring this programme to a close, ending in a mood of radiant hopefulness.

O Radiant Dawn, Splendour of eternal Light,

Sun of Justice:

Come, shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death. Isaiah had prophesied,

The people who walked in darkness have seen the great light upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.

Amen.

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Notes on Charles Giffes © John Gough

The Nantwich Singers

Musical Director: Ian Crawford

Soprano

Annabel Nielsen

Lyn Bright

Becky Daniels

Jane Riddle

Barbara Arch

Katy Robinson

Alto

Vanessa Layfield

Gilly Liebeck

Marjorie Seddon

Rachel Duerden

Anne-Marie Naylor

Tenor

Liam Tyler-Murphy

William Hall

John Duthie

Bass

David Guest

Jonathan Layfield

Quentin Duerden

David Burrowes

New Singers - Join us!

We are always pleased to hear from singers of any voice parts who are interested in joining us. It is important to have some experience of singing choral music and to be a reasonably good sight reader. Commitment to a challenging and wide-ranging repertoire is essential. We rehearse every Tuesday during term time between 7.30 and 9pm at St Mary's Church, Nantwich. For a short, informal audition with our musical director, please contact us via our website:

www.thenantwicksingers.org.

Forthcoming Events 2024

Summer Concerts

July 18 St Mary's, Nantwich

July 21 St Mary's, Astbury

Christmas Concerts

November 23 Victoria Hall, Hanley

December 8 St Peter's, Congleton

December 15 St Mary's, Nantwich

Please see our website for details and updates.

