

A choral journey to the New World, with music by Gibbons, Monteverdi, Parry, Gjeilo and McDowall

VOYAGE



MUSICAL DIRECTOR - IAN CRAWFORD
SOLO VIOLIN - ALISON LORAM



Registered Charity Number 1211249

Voyage

Our summer programme gathers around a general theme of “voyage” and, unsurprisingly, the sea makes its presence felt in various ways. Voyages may be voyages of the soul, as in Rani Arbo’s *Crossing the Bar*, a beautiful setting of Tennyson’s late poem, or then again they may simply be voyages through the hours from early dawn into bright day, as in Monteverdi’s crystalline madrigal *Ecco Mormorare l’Onde*. They could be voyages in the mind to exotic parts, conjured through indulgence in tobacco, as in Thomas Weelkes’ raucous *Come sirrah, Jack, ho!* Or indeed, any combination of these multifaceted but universal human experiences.

Our central item, however, is concerned with a very real and perilous voyage, made by the Pilgrims travelling to the New World on the *Mayflower*. Cecilia McDowall’s *Good News from England* captures the fervent hopefulness of the travellers, interwoven with trepidation about the future in this new land, the grief of tragic loss, and moments of great optimism and the determination to make this perilous journey ultimately fruitful. The solo violin accompaniment poignantly evokes the life and music of the “old world” that has been left behind as well as conjuring a vision of the new and better world that is hoped for. McDowall creates shimmering images through the subtle layering of voices, shifting rhythms and harmonies, which suggest both the material world of wind and waves, and the inner world of fugitive thoughts, hopes and fears. The text is drawn chiefly from contemporary writings - whence the title - and threaded through the whole is a devout Puritan perspective, culminating in a wonderful setting of the “The Old Hundredth”, which was sung on the *Mayflower* and in which the audience is now invited to join.

Programme

<i>Never weather-beaten sail</i>	Thomas Campion
<i>Ecco Mormorar l'Onde</i>	Claudio Monteverdi
Songs of Farewell (1)	C H H Parry
<i>My Soul, there is a Country</i>	
<i>Serenity (O Magnum Mysterium)</i>	Ola Gjeilo
<i>Crossing the Bar</i>	Rani Arbo
<i>Come Sirrah, Jack, Ho!</i>	Thomas Weelkes
<i>O Lord, In Thee is all my Trust</i>	Orlando Gibbons
Songs of Travel (3)	C H H Parry
<i>Never weather-beaten sail</i>	
Good News from New England	Cecilia McDowall
<i>An Unexpected Shore</i>	
<i>Ghost of a Feather</i>	
<i>Thanksgiving</i>	

Never weather-beaten sail Thomas Campion 1567-1620

*Never weather-beaten sail more willing bent to shore,
Never tired pilgrim's limbs affected slumber more,
Than my weary sprite now longs to fly out of my troubled breast.
O come quickly, O come quickly, O come quickly sweetest Lord,
And take my soul to rest.*

*Ever blooming are the joys of Heav'n's high Paradise:
Cold age deafs not there our ears, nor vapour dims our eyes;
Glory there the sun outshines, whose beams the blessed only see.
O come quickly, O come quickly, O come quickly glorious Lord,
And raise my sprite to Thee.
(Thomas Campion)*

Notes from the Poetry Foundation: *"In the preface of Campion's A Book of Ayres he writes, 'What epigrams are in poetry, the same are ayres in music, then in their chief perfection when they are short and well seasoned.' The best-known songs in the 1613 books are notable for precisely the features that characterize all of Campion's work. 'Never Weather-Beaten Sail,' for example, illustrates the intricate and careful creation of musical and verbal rhythm out of the accentual pattern of the words and the sensitive distribution of the vowel sounds. This song also epitomizes the sense one frequently has with Campion that the sacred and the secular are not far apart—a sense reinforced by the almost erotic urgency of both music and words in the last line: 'O come quickly, sweetest Lord, and take my soul to rest.'"*

The marriage of words and music embodies Campion's notion of the epigram in the perfection of simplicity. The first two lines have repeated melody and a gentle pace, the third line introduces complexity in contrasting weaving patterns of voices, and the rising dynamic and pitch of the fourth, ever more urgent, leads to the peaceful resolution of the last line. A life in miniature.

Ecco Mormorar l'Onde Claudio Monteverdi 1567-1643

*Ecco mormorar l'onde, et tremolar le fronde
A l'aura mattutinae, e gl'arboscelli, e sovra i verdi rami i vagh'augelli
Cantar soavemente, e rider l'Oriente;
Ecco gia l'alb'appare, e si specchia nel mare,
E rasserena il cielo, e'imperla il dolce gelo,
E gl'alti monti indora: O bellae vagh'Aurora,
L'aura è tua messaggera, e tu de l'aura
Ch'ogn'arso cor ristaura.*

*Now the waves murmur and the boughs and shrubs tremble
In the morning breeze, and on the green branches the pleasant birds
Sing softly and the east smiles;*

*Now dawn already appears and mirrors herself in the sea,
And makes the sky serene, and the gentle frost impearls the fields
And gilds the high mountains: O beautiful and gracious Aurora
The breeze is your messenger, and you the breeze's
Which revives each burnt out heart.
(Torquato Tasso, 1544-1595, trans. Luciano Rebay)*

A journey from early dawn to bright day, or from former to re-newed life. Monteverdi has been described as “one of the undisputed virtuoso madrigal writers of the later Renaissance” (Steve Young, 2000), and he published eight books of madrigals demonstrating his imaginative range and formidable technical musical skills. This beautiful example comes from the second: *Il secondo libro de madrigali à cinque voce* no.14, 1590. Voice pairing and mirroring, double and triple counterpoint are all in evidence here, but perhaps the most vivid feature is the extraordinarily beautiful word-painting throughout. There are three sections - first evoking the tremulous movement of leaves in the early morning light, then the strengthening sunlight mirrored in the sea and gilding the mountains that we hear in the mirroring of parts, and finally an almost mystical gentle hymn-like ending as the dawn eventually “revives each burnt out heart”.

Songs of Farewell (1)

C H H Parry 1848-1918

My Soul, there is a Country

*My Soul, there is a country
Far beyond the stars,
Where stands a winged sentry
All skillful in the wars;
There, above noise and danger
Sweet Peace sits, crown'd with smiles,
And One born in a manger
Commands the beauteous files.
He is thy gracious friend
And (O my Soul awake!)
Did in pure love descend,
To die here for thy sake.
If thou canst get but thither,
There grows the flow'r of peace,
The rose that cannot wither,
Thy fortress, and thy ease.
Leave then thy foolish ranges,
For none can thee secure,
But One, who never changes,
Thy God, thy life, thy cure.
("Peace", Henry Vaughan, 1621-1695)*

Parry composed the *Songs of Farewell*, of which this is the first, in the later years of the First World War. He was greatly affected by the war not least because he had lost several students to it. Parry died just before Armistice Day.

It is an extraordinary setting of Henry Vaughan's poem, encompassing ever changing moods in the space of a few minutes. It is as though Parry is processing his fleeting thoughts and marshalling them into focus in real time - as though he is speaking to us directly. By the time we get to "*one who never changes*" he has taken flight, and is clearly revelling in his wonderfully ironic and colourful modulations, brazenly belying the words by shifting and changing constantly, before arriving at the joyfully confident closing affirmation.

Henry Vaughan was a Welsh metaphysical poet, much influenced by the more famous George Herbert, but with a poetic voice of his own, perhaps most famously exemplified in the beautiful opening of his longer work, *World*: "*I saw eternity the other night*".

Serenity (O Magnum Mysterium) Ole Gjeilo b.1978

O magnum mysterium et admirabile sacramentum ut animalie viderent Dominum natum, iacentem in præsepio!

Beata Virgo, cujus viscera meruerunt,

Magnum mysterium portare Dominum Christum. Alleluia.

O great mystery and wonderful sacrament, that animals should see the new-born Lord lying in a manger!

O blessed virgin, whose womb was worthy to bear the Lord Jesus Christ. Alleluia.

(Responsorial chant from the Matins of Christmas)

"All I wanted to do with this piece was to write something that came straight from my heart, without pretence or filter." (Ola Gjeillo)

More often associated with the Christmas season, these beautiful words conjure up an image of divine love in creation, and are set here with Gjeillo's characteristic skill in building an atmosphere of wonder, like the smoke of incense rising and dispersing, which he achieves through the complex layering and interweaving of eight voice parts. In contrast, there are moments of crystal-like unison ("*ut animalia viderent Dominum natum in præsepio*") supported by long held harmonies underneath. The whole is like a vision, ever growing and subsiding in luminous colours.

Crossing the Bar

Rani Arbo

*Sunset and evening star and one clear call for me!
 And may there be no moaning of the bar, when I put out to sea.
 But such a tide as moving seems asleep, too full for sound and foam,
 When that which drew from out the boundless deep turns again home.*

*Twilight and evening bell, and after that the dark!
 And may there be no sadness of farewell when I embark.
 For tho' from out our bounds of Time and Place the flood may bear me far,
 I hope to see my Pilot face to face when I have crost the bar.
 (Alfred, Lord Tennyson)*

Rani Arbo freely combines genres in her work, and frequently develops different arrangements and renditions for a variety of ensembles and styles. Emboldened by this knowledge, when the Nantwich Singers sang this for the first time a few years ago, I asked her if it would be acceptable for one of our members to write a slightly more developed descant for the final verse. With characteristic generosity she gave her permission, and Quentin composed a line for Lyn, which Rani Arbo approved, and which you hear in this performance.

Musically, this is deceptively simple. The gentle rocking motion of the melody evokes a boat on a gentle sea, and the syncopations are so subtle as to be barely perceptible. Arbo captures the elegiac quality of this lovely poem in a melody of the utmost simplicity and poignancy. The poem is itself an extended metaphor for the natural transition from life to death. The poet's son Hallam wrote that this poem was *"made in my father's eighty-first year, after his serious illness in 1888-9, on a day in October 1889, while crossing the Solent, as we came from Aldworth to Farringford. When he repeated it to me in the evening, I said, 'That is the crown of your life's work.' He answered, 'It came to me in a moment.'"*

Come Sirrah, Jack, Ho!

Thomas Weelkes 1576-1623

*Come, sirrah Jack, ho! Fill some tobacco,
 Bring a wire and some fire,
 Haste, haste away, Quick, I say, Do not stay, Shun delay,
 For I drank none good today.*

*Fill the pipe once more, My brains dance Trenchmore,
 I am giddy.
 My head and brains, back and reins, joints and veins, from all pains
 It doth well purge and make clean.*

*I swear that this tobacco is perfect Trinidad;
By the very, very Mass Never, never, never was
Better gear Than is here By the rood, For the blood
It is very, very good, 'tis very good.*

*Then those that do condemn it, or such as not commend it,
Never were so wise to learn Good tobacco to discern.
Let them go Pluck a crow and not know As I do
The sweet of Trinidad, Trinidad.
(Thomas Weelkes)*

Thomas Weelkes was - in addition to being a brilliant composer - a notorious drunkard who was frequently castigated for unseemly behaviour (such as urinating on the Dean from the organ loft during a service) and eventually sacked altogether from his position of organist and choir master at Chichester cathedral. His musical abilities were clearly greatly valued, nonetheless, since he was allowed to continue as a singer even after so much deplorable behaviour. His compositional output was extensive, and his sacred music and, in particular his madrigals, amongst the most celebrated of the era. He wrote many of the latter, including this one from about 1608 (from *Airs or Fantastic Spirits for Three Voices*) which pulls no punches about where his interests lay and gives full rein to his exuberant hedonism in a spritely three-part madrigal. Beginning in a lively, even giddy, jig, the style then shifts to declamatory mode. This tobacco is unmatched in the history of tobacco and anyone who disagrees, well "*let them go pluck a crow and not know as I do the sweet of Trinidad!*" After that, a return to giddy jig seems called for, to round off the whole and remind us that it's all just a bit of riotous fun when all's said and done.

O Lord, In Thee is all my Trust Orlando Gibbons 1583-1625

*O Lord, in Thee is all my trust, Give ear unto my woeful cry.
Refuse me not, that am unjust, but bowing down Thy heav'nly eye,
Behold how I do still lament my sins wherein I Thee offend.
O Lord, for them shall I be shent? Thee to please I do intend.
No, no, not so! Thy will is bent to deal with sinners in thine ire,
But when in heart they shall repent Thou grant'st with speed their just desire.
To Thee therefore shall I still cry, to wash away my sinful crime,
Thy blood, O Lord, is not yet dry but that it may help me in time.
Haste Thee, O Lord, Haste Thee, I say, to pour on me Thy gifts of grace
That when this life shall fleet away in heav'n with Thee I may have place,
Where Thou dost reign eternally, with God, which once Thee down did send,
Where angels sing continually. To Thee be praise, world without end, Amen.*

Unlike his contemporary Thomas Weelkes, Orlando Gibbons seems to have led an almost blameless life, marked by early success and acclaim and never blotted by drunkenness or unseemly behaviour. Renowned especially as a keyboard player, he became a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal as junior organist in 1605, which position he maintained until his death. He may have been a pupil of William Byrd, and his own son Edward went on to teach Henry Purcell, among others - which offers a nice genealogical line for English music at that period.

While it is very different in style from the Monteverdi *Ecco Mormorar l'Onde* there are also clear similarities reflecting the stylistic preoccupations of the time. There are lovely imitative and parallel passages, for example, and a delightful instance of word painting in the cascading phrase passed from part to part on "*With God, which once Thee down did send*". The ending comes as a calm and meditative hymn-like close.

His monument has the following inscription:

To Orlando Gibbons of Cambridge, Born among the Muses and Musick; Organist of the Royal Chapel, emulating, by the Touch of his Fingers, the Harmony of the Spheres; Composer of many Hymns, which sound his Praise no less than that of his Maker; A man of integrity, whose manner of Life, and sweetness of Temper, vy'd with that of his Art; being sent for to Dover to attend the Nuptials of King Charles and Mary, he died of the Small-Pox, and was convey'd to the heavenly Choir on Whit-Sunday, Anno 1625. Elizabeth his wife, who bare him seven Children, little able to survive such a loss, to her most deserving Husband hath with Tears erected this Monument.

Songs of Farewell (3)

C H H Parry 1848-1918

Never weather beaten sail

*Never weather-beaten sail more willing bent to shore,
Never tired pilgrim's limbs affected slumber more,
Than my weary sprite now longs to fly out of my troubled breast.
O come quickly, O come quickly, O come quickly sweetest Lord,
And take my soul to rest.*

*Ever blooming are the joys of Heav'n's high Paradise:
Cold age deafs not there our ears, nor vapour dims our eyes;
Glory there the sun outshines, whose beams the blessed only see.
O come quickly, O come quickly, O come quickly glorious Lord,
And raise my sprite to Thee.
(Thomas Campion)*

Parry's setting of Campion's words in *Never weather-beaten sail* honours the primacy of the words while employing more contrapuntal writing and modulation than does Campion himself. The second verse subtly intensifies the drama initially

simply through beginning a third higher in pitch, so that the sopranos soar to a top A at the climax on “*Glory there the sun outshines*”. This rhapsodic crest of a wave then subsides to a *pianissimo* “*Raise my sprite to Thee!*” in almost whispered awe.

Good News from New England

Cecilia McDowall b.1951

1. An Unexpected Shore

And lo! The winds did blow us ever to the North; so that we crossed the Seas to seek the Lord's right worship and the Gospel's sweet simplicity, did now espy an unexpected shore; yet still resolv'd in our extremitie to make it ours, by Compact, orderly and free.

And here is to be noted a spetiall providence of God, and a great mercie. For we did take a better view, and soon resolv'd where to pitch our dwelling: our first house to raise for common use.

(William Bradford (1590-1657) freely adapted and abridged by Nicholas Dakin.)

2. Ghost of a Feather

A single cry from the ghost of a feather.

A solitary goodwife drops into the bay.

One burial, then another, then another.

The first house on Christmas Day.

'Cole's Hill' by © John Greening (b.1954)

Faint not, poor soul, in God still trust;

Fear not the things thou suffer must;

For, whom he loves he doth chastise,

And then all tears wipes from their eyes.

(William Bradford, on the death of his wife, who fell overboard and drowned, aged 23)

3. Thanksgiving

After the famines of the first winter, our harvest now being gotten in, we did after a special manner rejoice and give thanks together, many of the Indians coming in amongst us we entertained and feasted. And although it was not so plentiful again, yet by the goodness of our God, we were so far from want, that we often wished you partakers of our plenty.

(Edward Winslow (1595-1655) Thanksgiving letter, December 1621, freely adapted and abridged by Nicholas Dakin.)

For mee a table thou has spread,

In presence of my foes:

Thou dost annoynt my head with oyle,

My cup it overflows.

And in the Lord's house I shall dwell

As long as days shall bee.

(From Psalm 23, Bay Psalm Book, 1640)

“Old Hundredth” Audience invited to join in:

**Showt to Jehovah, al the earth,
 Serv ye Jehovah with gladnes:
 Before him come with singing merth.
 Know, that Jehovah he God is.
 It’s he that made us and not we:
 His folk, and sheep of his feeding.
 O with confession enter ye
 His gates, his courtyards with praising:
 Confess to him, bless his name.
 Because Jehovah he good is:
 His mercy ever is the same
 And his faith, unto all ages. Amen, amen.**

Composer’s Note

Good News from New England was commissioned by Geoffrey Speed for City Chamber Choir in London and its founder and conductor, Stephen Jones. The work is scored for mixed voices with solo violin and draws its title from Edward Winslow’s chronicles of 1624, *Good Newes from New England*, in which he describes the early experiences of the *Mayflower* Pilgrims’ arrival and settlement in the New World.

‘An Unexpected Shore’ takes its text from the journal of the Puritan Separatist William Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation. Bradford was chosen to be governor of Plymouth Colony in 1621 and gives a telling account of the arrival of the Pilgrims in a new land after their long and perilous journey. These resilient non-conformist Pilgrims were inspired by a ‘sense of earthly grandeur and divine purpose’ and the opening movement charts their voyage from one shore to another by gradually descending from A major, through A flat major, to G major, perhaps bringing a sense of establishing a new community in this harsh landscape.

‘Ghost of a Feather’ is fashioned from two very different texts, 400 years apart, on the same poignant matter: the death of William Bradford’s wife. John Greening’s subtle yet powerful poem describes how Bradford’s wife fell overboard into a calm sea in the harbour, in December 1620, while her husband was ashore. Conversely,

there is something resolute, in the face of catastrophe, in Bradford's own poem, written after his wife Dorothy's tragic death. In setting the Bradford text I adopted a semi-*Bay Psalm Book* idiom, with its plain homophonic style, introducing occasional dissonance to intensify the anguish. In contrast to this, the opening and closing sections of the movement might seem more folk-like, with a violin accompaniment which perhaps reflects the known Celtic influence on fiddle playing in New England at the time. *Cole's Hill*, the title of John Greening's poem, refers to the first burial ground of the Pilgrims in Plymouth.

The third movement brings perhaps a sense of release and joyfulness in thanksgiving. The violin solo is in playful dialogue with the dance-like vocal lines. These words are taken from Winslow's Thanksgiving letter of 1621, written to a friend in England. A year after the *Mayflower* Pilgrims settled in Plymouth, they had much to celebrate. The following section reprises material from the opening movement, which in turn leads to Henry Ainsworth's version of *The Old Hundredth*, which was sung on the *Mayflower* and subsequently in the Plymouth colony. The audience is encouraged to participate in singing this hymn.

© Cecilia McDowall

Programme notes © Rachel Duerden 2025

The Nantwich Singers
Musical Director: Ian Crawford

Soprano

Barbara Arch
Lyn Bright
Katie Jankinson
Annabel Nielsen
Katy Robinson
Kathryn Skerratt

Alto

Jan Campbell
Rachel Duerden
Gilly Liebeck
Anne-Marie Naylor
Rachael Parkinson
Marjorie Seddon

Tenor

Michael Booth
John Duthie
William Hall
Liam Tyler-Murphy
Stephen Newlove

Bass

David Burrowes
Quentin Duerden
David Guest
Oliver Rowland

Ian Crawford is Musical Director of Nantwich Singers. Ian grew up in London and was educated at Christ Church, Oxford. He regularly works with choirs and ensembles across the North West; recent highlights include Bach's *St John Passion* with 18th Century Sinfonia, Finzi's *In Terra Pax* with Northern Chamber Orchestra and Mahler's *Resurrection* Symphony at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall. Ian's compositions are published by Oxford University Press, Novello and through his own website: www.redscarfmusic.co.uk. His *Sussex Carol* (pub. OUP) was selected as an Editors' Choice by J.W. Pepper in 2018 and was featured last Christmas on BBC television. Ian is currently Director of Music at The King's School in Macclesfield.

Alison Loram was born and brought up in Shrewsbury, and began playing the violin through Shropshire's County Music Service, going on to study at the Royal College of Music with Hugh Bean, John Ludlow and Rodney Friend. In a postgraduate year leading the orchestra of the National Centre for Orchestral Studies at London University, she was soloist in performances of Barber's Violin Concerto and Rimsky-Korsakov's "*Scheherazade*".

Playing-related musculoskeletal problems led Alison to the Alexander Technique which she has taught at The Royal Birmingham Conservatoire since 1993. After gaining a BSc, MSc and PhD, she also developed a career as an independent research scientist and is a practitioner with the British Association of Performing Arts Medicine.

Since returning to the violin in 2011, Alison has appeared regularly in recitals, chamber and orchestral concerts in Cheshire, Staffordshire, Shropshire, and the West Midlands, and as soloist with several local orchestras. Professionally, she has performed as guest-leader of the St John's Festival and Stockport Symphony Orchestras, as an "extra player" with the English Symphony and Pro Anima orchestras, and leads the Nantwich Sinfonia for the Nantwich Choral society under the direction of John Naylor. Alison is also a keen chamber musician and recitalist, with established duo partnerships with pianists Yuki Kagajo and Christopher Symons, and regular appearances with the Forum Piano Trio and Nantwich Chamber Ensemble including at St Mary's. Future engagements include recitals at Ty Pawb in Wrexham and St Alkmunds in Shrewsbury, and in 2026, performances of the Bruch Concerto with the Meole Brace Chamber orchestra, and Mendelssohn's second piano trio with the Forum Trio.

Changes afoot

This will be the last concert directed for us by Ian Crawford, who has been our Musical Director for the past 3 years. We have been very fortunate to benefit from his musicianship, energy and passion for music making. He has taken us down a wide range of new choral pathways, as well as writing beautiful music for us. The Nantwich Singers will miss him very much. We wish him well in his new job in the London area.

We are delighted to welcome Susan Marrs to take over as our new MD from September. We look forward to continuing our mission with Susan to bring exciting and uplifting choral concerts to the South Cheshire area, featuring newly written works as well as classics from the past.

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:

“Sing Wellerman and Sing Well!” - a vocal workshop

November 1st at 2pm in St Mary's Church Nantwich

Christmas Concert - December 10th at 7pm in Tarporley Chapel

Christmas Concert - December 14th at 3pm in St Mary's church Nantwich

Further details will be on the website in due course.

Sound and video recording by the audience is prohibited.

Thank you.

