



Saturday 21 June, 7.30pm

St Andrew & St Cuthman Church, Steyning

Madrigals & Motets for a Summer Evening

BREMF Consort of Voices

James Elias *director*

John Sheppard c.1515–1558

Western Wind Mass:

Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus Dei

Orlando Gibbons 1583–1625

O Lord, in thy wrath

Thomas Weelkes 1576–1623

Hosanna to the Son of David

Gibbons

Hosanna to the Son of David

Interval

Jacques Arcadelt 1507–1568

Il bianco e dolce cigno

Orazio Vecchi 1550–1605

Il bianco e dolce cigno

William Byrd 1540–1623

The nightingale

Gibbons

Fair ladies that to love captived are
What is our life?
The silver swan

Ralph Vaughan Williams 1872–1958

The Turtle Dove
Come away, come away, death
The Lover's Ghost

Robert Lucas Pearsall 1795–1856

Lay a garland
Summer is y'coming in

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The music

Although there is a strong emphasis on the work of Orlando Gibbons in this concert to mark the 400th anniversary of his death in 1625, the programme also focuses on how *a cappella* music transitioned out of the sacred environment and into the secular.

The Western Wind Mass is one of three well-known early 16th-century works which share this title. Taverner, Sheppard and Tye all use the same tune as the *cantus firmus*. It had long been common practice to do this with sacred plainchant, but in the 15th century Franco-Flemish composers including Dufay, Josquin des Prez and Ockeghem also began to use secular popular tunes as the basis for composition of masses. Hearing the melody to this folk song would have called to mind a wistful and melancholic mood:

*'Westron wynde when wyll thow blow,
the smalle rayne downe can rayne?
Cryst, if my love were in my armys,
and I in my bed agayne!'*

In Sheppard's version, the tune is most often given to the top line, making it very present. The effect of hearing this tune repeated so many times is to give the mass a 'theme and variations' feel (to use a later phrase). The first half concludes with two of Gibbons' more famous sacred works, together with 'Hosanna to the Son of David' by Thomas Weelkes, a contemporary of Gibbons, for comparison.

In the second half we move from sacred works to secular. The madrigal – from a word that meant 'in the mother tongue' (rather than in Latin) – originated in Italy, and we start with two settings of 'Il bianco e dolce cigno'. Madrigals often take as their secular theme the natural world, and this includes not only birds and other animals, but also earthly human love and sexuality, and the inevitability of death; many composers found in the madrigal the freedom to express emotions that they might have felt inappropriate in a church setting, such as passion, melancholy, or even quasi-philosophical musings. Today's selection has a little bit of all of those.

If the Western Wind mass was the 16th-century church borrowing a tune from folk music, then Vaughan Williams' folk songs do the opposite, with settings of secular words and tunes harmonised in a style that has echoes of the rich English church choral heritage. His style is not unlike that of Gibbons, despite the centuries between them, with imitative entries and skilful use of passing notes in the middle parts to create a very fluid harmonic structure. Another gem of English polyphony, Pearsall's 'Lay a garland', is a favourite amongst choral singers. We hope you enjoy listening to it as much as we enjoy singing it! We end with Pearsall's version of 'Summer is y'coming in' to celebrate Midsummer's Day.

We will be focusing on Gibbons even more in our concert with Cavillum Consort of Viols at Brighton Early Music Festival on 16 October in St Paul's Church. Please visit bremf.org.uk to sign up to the festival newsletter to receive our latest news and updates. Tickets for the 2025 Festival go on sale from 23 July for Festival Friends and 4 August for all.

The texts

O Lord, in thy wrath rebuke me not:
neither chasten me in thy displeasure.
Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am weak:
O Lord, heal me, for my bones are vexed.
My soul is also sore troubled:
but, Lord, how long wilt thou punish me?
O save me, for thy mercy's sake.

Hosanna to the Son of David:

Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.
Blessed be the King of Israel.
Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest places.
Hosanna in the highest heavens.

Il bianco e dolce cigno

cantando more, ed io
piangendo giung' al fin del viver mio.
Stran' e diversa sorte,
ch'ei more sconsolato
ed io moro beato.
Morte che nel moriré
m'empie di gioia tutto e di desire.
Se nel morir, altro dolor non sento,
di mille mort' il di sarei contento.

The white and sweet swan
dies singing, and I,
weeping, reach the end of my life.
Strange and different fate,
that he dies disconsolate
and I die a blessed death,
which in dying fills me
full of joy and desire.
If in dying, were I to feel no other pain,
I would be content to die a thousand deaths a day.

The nightingale so pleasant and so gay,
in greenewood groves, delights to make his dwelling,
in fields to flye, chanting his roundelaye,
at lyberty, against the Cage rebelling.
But my poore hart with sorowes over swelling,
through bondayge vyle, bynding my freedome short,
no pleasure takes in these his sports excelling,
nor in his song receiveth no comfort.

Fair ladies that to love captived are,

and chaste desires do nourish in your mind,
let not her fault your sweet affections
ne blot the bounty of all womankind.

What is our life? A play of passion.
Our mirth the music of division.
Our mother's wombs the tiring houses be,
where we are dress'd for this short comedy.

Heav'n the judicious sharp spectator is,
that sits and marks still who doth act amiss.
Our graves, that hide us from the searching sun
are like drawn curtains when the play is done.

Thus march we, playing to our latest rest;
Only we die in earnest, that's no jest.

The silver swan, who living had no note,
when death approached, unlock'd her silent throat;
leaning her breast against the reedy shore,
thus sung her first and last, and sung no more:
'Farewell, all joys; O death, come close mine eyes;
more geese than swans now live, more fools than wise.'

The Turtle Dove

Fare you well, my dear, I must be gone,
and leave you for a while;
if I roam away I'll come back again,
though I roam ten thousand miles, my dear,
though I roam ten thousand miles.

So fair thou art, my bonny lass,
so deep in love am I;
but I never will prove false to the bonny lass I love,
till the stars fall from the sky, my dear,
till the stars fall from the sky.

The sea will never run dry, my dear,
nor the rocks melt with the sun,
but I never will prove false to the bonny lass I love,
till all these things be done, my dear,
till all these things be done.

O yonder doth sit that little turtle dove,
he doth sit on yonder high tree,
a-making a moan for the loss of his love,
as I will do for thee, my dear,
as I will do for thee.

Come away, come away, death,
and in sad cypress let me be laid.
Fly away, fly away, breath;
I am slain by a fair cruel maid.
My shroud of white, stuck all with yew,
O, prepare it!
My part of death, no one so true
did share it.

Not a flower, not a flower sweet,
on my black coffin let there be strown.
Not a friend, not a friend greet
my poor corpse, where my bones shall be thrown.
A thousand thousand sighs to save,
lay me, O, where
sad true lover never find my grave,
to weep there!

The Lover's Ghost

Well met, well met my own true love;
long time I have been absent from thee,
I am lately come from the salt sea,
and 'tis all for the sake, my love, of thee.

I have three ships all on the salt sea,
and one of them has brought me to land,
I've four and twenty mariners on board,
you shall have music at your command.

The ship wherein my love shall sail
is glorious for to behold,
the sails shall be of shining silk,
the mast shall be of the fine beaten gold.

I might have had a King's daughter,
and fain she would have married me,
but I forsook her crown of gold,
and 'tis all for the sake, my love of thee.

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.

Summer is y'coming in,
loud sing cuckoo!
Groweth seed and bloweth mead
and springeth the weed new,
Loud sing cuckoo!
Ewe is bleating after lamb
and calf crieth after cow.
Deer are belling, buds are swelling,
merrie sing cuckoo!
Be silent never now,
loud sing cuckoo!

The performers

BREMf Consort of Voices was founded by Deborah Roberts in 2009 and is a consort of semi-professional, student and experienced amateur singers. Dedicated to giving dramatic and exciting performances of music from the Renaissance and early Baroque, the ensemble gives several concerts each year in collaboration with BREMF. It has taken part in music ranging from 15th-century chant and polyphony, to the spectacular 1589 Florentine Intermedi with renaissance orchestra and great Venetian works with The English Cornett & Sackbut Ensemble. Now directed by James Elias, for the 2024 Brighton Early Music Festival the choir joined Netherlands-based ensemble Cappella Pratensis in a programme of 15th-century music by Dufay, Dunstable and Frye.

bremf.org.uk/ensembles/bcv

Sopranos:

Eleanor Knight
Olly Parr
Rebecca Rees
Cathy Rowland

Altos:

Maria Birch
Isabelle Chousmer-Kerr
Bibi Lees
Silvia Reseghetti
Charlotte Tayler

Tenors:

Nick Boston
Nicolas Chisholm
Peter Larcombe
David Waterhouse *

Basses:

Anthony Jay
Simon Madge **
Bill Vickery

* soloist for Western Wind tune

** soloist in The Turtle Dove

James Elias has been singing in choirs for nearly half a century, studying under James O'Donnell, George Guest and Richard Marlow in various Cambridge choirs, before singing and conducting regularly in churches, concerts, recordings and broadcasts in London and abroad. Now a specialist in *a cappella* choral music, his negligible claims to musical fame include being three yards away from José Carreras on stage in a performance of Bizet's *Carmen*, and singing at the Sydney Opera House.