‘FROM NEAR AND FAR’, Summer 2015

*Canción mixteca* José López Alavez (1889–1974)

The melody of this much-loved Mexican song was composed by Alavez in 1912, adding the words three years later to express nostalgia for his home region of Oaxaca after a move to Mexico City. ‘How far I am from the land where I was born! Oh Land of Sun! I yearn to see you!’

*Ellan Vannin* F. H. Townend, arr. Maurice Jacobson

Manx for ‘the Isle of Man’, *Ellan Vannin* is a poem by Eliza Craven Green from 1854 which, with the tune by the otherwise unknown Townend, has become the island’s unofficial national anthem.

*The Teddy Bears’ Picnic* John W. Bratton (1867–1947), arr. Andrew Carter

This much-loved ‘English’ song is not as ‘near’ as it might seem. It actually began life as an instrumental piece in 1907, written by the (otherwise long-forgotten) American composer, John Walter Bratton. The words, by Irish songwriter Jimmy Kennedy, were only added 25 years later, in 1932.

*Hanacpachap cussicuinin* Anonymous Peruvian

Published in Lima in 1631, this anonymous hymn to the Virgin Mary in the Quechua language is the earliest printed polyphonic music from the Americas. The Franciscan friar Juan Pérez Bocanegra included it in a manual for priests as music to be sung for procession. It references both Christian and Inca traditions in its text and music. ‘Heaven's joy! A thousand times shall we praise you. O hope of humankind, hear our prayer!’

*Shenandoah* American folk-song, arr. James Erb

A traditional boatmen’s song, which originally referred to an Oneida Iroquois chief (‘Shenandoah’) and a canoe-going trader on the Missouri who wanted to marry his daughter. As often with folk-songs, over time the words and the meaning have changed, so that it now seems to refer to the Shenandoah River, which is in Virginia (about 1000 miles away from the Missouri!). That confusion aside, it’s a lovely song, here in an eight-part arrangement written for the University of Richmond Choir in 1971.

*Dravidian Dithyramb* Victor Paranjoti (1906–1967)

Paranjoti was an Indian musician with a deep love for Western Classical music, and pioneered the performance of choral music in India. This infectious piece was written in 1962, but receives its Damons premiere tonight. ‘Dravidian’ refers to the peoples of southern India; a ‘dithyramb’ was a passionate choral hymn in honour of Dionysus, the god of wine and fertility.

*Skip to my loo* arr. David Cooke

This arrangement was made especially for the Damons in 2013. While now generally known as a dance-song from the frontier days of the American West, ‘Skip to my Lou’ also appears, less widely, as ‘Skip to my/the loo’, a corruption of the Scots *lue*, or *love*.

*Something* George Harrison (1943–2001), arr. Robin Grayson

John Lennon thought this the best song on the 1969 *Abbey Road* album; Paul McCartney has called it the best song George Harrison ever wrote. Tonight we perform an arrangement originally written for pupils at Aylesbury Grammar School.

*Alouette* French folk-song, arr. John Bertalot (b.1931)

Though now a jaunty children’s song, the text is much more sinister: it warns the lark of the title that its feathers will be plucked out in retribution for waking the singer up! The song may originally have been sung while women plucked fowls; it first appears in print in a 19th-century Canadian collection. The arranger is an English organist and composer who served as organist of Trinity Church, Princeton, 1983–98, during which time he wrote this for The Princeton Singers.

*And so it goes* Billy Joel (b.1949), arr. Bob Chilcott

A beautiful Billy Joel ballad, inspired by his doomed relationship with the model Elle Macpherson. The arrangement was made for the King’s Singers.

*Moon River* Henry Mancini (1924–1994), arr. Alex Flood

*Paddy McGinty’s Goat* Bert Lee & R. P. Weston, arr. Richard G. Grylls

Lastly, a couple more arrangements written by two of the Damons’ (former) directors of music; both are firm favourites with the choir. Alex arranged the Oscar-winning *Moon River* (from *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*) for us in 2003, and we’ve been singing Richard’s version of *Paddy McGinty* - a music-hall song from 1917, popularised more recently by the be-cardiganned Irish crooner, Val Doonican - for about fifteen years!