

Programme: 'Light of my soul'

Christe qui lux es et dies

Plainchant: pre 9th-century
Polyphony: Robert White (c.1538–1574)
This hymn for the service of Compline is an evening prayer for peaceful rest, full of the imagery of light and darkness. Robert White, a Catholic composer in the reign of Mary and the early years of Elizabeth, made no fewer than four settings of this text. Most verses are sung in their original plainchant but we hear White's music to the words 'Memento nostri, Domine' ('Remember us, O Lord').

Set me as a seal René Clausen (b.1953)
Originally a movement in the American composer's 1989 sacred cantata, *A New Creation*, this work has since become very popular with choirs as a piece in its own right. It is a setting of two short verses from the Song of Songs. As well as composing, Clausen was conductor of the Concordia Choir, Minnesota for many years. We recently sang his piece 'A Jubilant Song'.

Northern Lights Ola Gjeilo (b.1978)
This is the first time the Damons have sung anything by Gjeilo, a young Norwegian composer based in New York. Written about ten years ago, this piece was inspired by the 'terrible, powerful beauty' of the *Aurora borealis*, and is another setting from the Song of Songs: 'Thou art beautiful, O my love, sweet and comely daughter of Jerusalem... sweet and comely as Jerusalem. Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have made me flee away.'

Lord, save the faithful ('Gospodi, spasi') and Trisagion

Pavel Chesnokov (1877–1944)
(Solo: Simon Beattie)
Chesnokov was a prolific Russian choral composer, with over 500 works to his name. These two sections come from a

setting of the Orthodox liturgy, written about 1910. One passage sounds remarkably like the Flower Duet in Delibes' *Lakmé* (the British Airways theme). The opera was premiered in Russia just a few years before. Maybe Chesnokov just couldn't get the tune out of his head?

Reading

Veni, Sancte Spiritus

Leoš Janáček (1854–1928)
A rousing setting for men's voices of the Whitsun antiphon by the Czech composer, from about 1900. 'Come, Holy Spirit: fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle your love in them. You have gathered the nations together in the unity of faith. Amen.'

Light of my soul

Robert Lucas Pearsall (1795–1856)
In this six-part 'madrigal', from 1838, you can hear some of the sumptuous harmonies Pearsall went on to employ, two years later, to such great effect in the famous 8-part *Lay a garland* (long a Damons favourite). The words are a 'Moorish serenade', taken from the contemporary novel *Leila; or the Siege of Granada* by Edward Bulwer-Lytton (of 'It was a dark and stormy night' fame).

Reading

Can she excuse my wrongs

John Dowland (1563–1626)
This song appears in Dowland's 'First Book of Songs or Ayres' of 1597 and is set to the same music as his 'Earl of Essex Galliard'. In the third strain of the song the altos and tenors sing, in canon, the melody of the popular ballad, 'Will You Walk the Woods so Wild'. This may be a reference to the Earl's habit of retreating to his home in the woods north east of London.

The words, the lament of a banished lover, are not directly reflected in the rather cheerful melody of the galliard.

Tanzen und springen

Hans Leo Hassler (1564–1612)
From *Lustgarten neuer teutscher Gesäng* (Nuremberg, 1601)
Hassler was born in Nuremberg, studied in Venice and returned to Germany to work as composer, organist and instrument-maker in a number of cities and courts. This is a rather more straightforwardly cheerful galliard than Dowland's, describing how dancing, leaping, music and pretty young girls make you happier than silver and gold ever could.

INTERVAL

The Keel Row arr. David Cooke
I sowed the seeds of love
arr. Gustav Holst (1874–1934)
Ae fond kiss Paul Mealor (b.1975)
(Solos: Rachel Meldrum, Martin Cunningham)
The Song of the Blacksmith arr. Holst

Holst published his collection of *6 Choral Folksongs* in 1916. Two of them, *I love my love* and *Swansea Town*, have long been favourites of the Damons, but these two are new to us. Both are graced with prominent roles for the altos. In *The Song of the Blacksmith* Holst takes the first verse only of one of the most famous, and beautiful, English folksongs, to create a vivid and lively musical portrait of a blacksmith at his forge. Also new to us is David's arrangement for 5 upper voices of *The Keel Row*, which receives its world premiere tonight, and Paul Mealor's recent setting of Robert Burns' poem. This is Mealor's contribution to a series of new Burns' settings to raise money for the Ballater Flood Appeal - the

historic town of Ballater was particularly damaged in the disastrous Deeside flooding at New Year 2016. The Keel Row evokes the life and work of the keelmen of Newcastle upon Tyne who worked on large, shallow-draughted boats ferrying coal along the river to waiting collier ships

Reading

The Girl from Ipanema

Antônio Carlos Jobim (1927–1994)
arr. Berty Rice
'Garota de Ipanema', the 1962 hit bossa nova song, originally sung by Astrud Gilberto, is one of the most recorded hits of all time. Ipanema is a fashionable seaside neighbourhood in Rio de Janeiro and the song was inspired by the seventeen year-old Heloísa Eneida Menezes Paes Pinto (now Helô Pinheiro), spotted by the composer and fellow musicians on her way to buy cigarettes for her mother. She is now a celebrity in Brazil and beyond.

And so it goes

Billy Joel (b.1949), arr. Bob Chilcott
(Solos: Martin Cunningham, WWW Helen Baker)
A beautiful Billy Joel ballad, from the album "Storm Front" (1989), inspired by his doomed relationship with the model Elle Macpherson. The arrangement was made for the King's Singers.

The Bare Necessities

Terry Gilkyson (1916–1999)
arr. Nicholas Hare
Another hit from the Sixties, which was written for the Disney film of 'The Jungle Book' and was nominated for an Oscar in 1967.

Programme notes by Simon Beattie & Martin Cunningham