



THE DAMON SINGERS AUTUMN CONCERT 2022

At St Peter & St Paul Church, Great Missenden



My Spirit sang all day

Gerald Finzi (1901 – 1956)

Today's concert celebrates the 150th anniversary of the birth of Ralph Vaughan Williams which falls in just four days' time on 12th October. Gerald Finzi was one of his many friends and collaborators, seen as a natural successor until his early death. This exuberant piece is the third of his *Seven Unaccompanied Part Songs* (1934–7), all setting words by Robert Bridges. Here, the late Poet Laureate finds joy, in music.

I praise the tender flower

Gerald Finzi

In this setting, the first from the same collection, the poet is unable openly to express his love but can make apparent in poetry his joy in both a tender flower and a gentle maid.

The Hills

John Ireland (1879 – 1962)

John Ireland, a contemporary of Vaughan Williams at the Royal College of Music (RCM), composed this piece for the Coronation in 1953. It sets words by the poet and travel writer James Kirkup (1918 – 2009) and finds beauty, and an almost religious serenity, in nature.



Two settings from 'Five English Folk Songs'

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872 – 1958)

The set of *Five English Folk Songs* was 'freely arranged' from the originals by RVW in 1912, though they could equally be regarded as compositions in their own right, such is the skill and complexity involved in their adaptation.

IV. *The Lover's Ghost*: Although partly derived from ballads known variously as 'The Lover's Ghost' and 'The Daemon Lover', there are no overt supernatural references in the verses arranged by Vaughan Williams. In a setting of radiant intensity, with a passionate climax, the poet declares his love, describes the glorious and golden ships in which his beloved will sail and reveals how he has refused a king's daughter 'all for the sake, my love, of thee'.

I. *The Dark Eyed Sailor*: This folk song was noted by Vaughan Williams on his first collecting trip to Ingrave, Essex in 1903. It has since been found with surprisingly little variation as far afield as Newfoundland as well as across Britain and Ireland and has subsequently been traced to a printed broadside ballad published only about seventy years before Vaughan Williams collected it. He clearly regarded the piece with great affection, as can be heard in this wonderfully affirmative setting.



Sicut lilium

Antoine Brumel (c.1460 – 1512/13)

A beautiful setting of an antiphon for the Feast of the Assumption by a French master of the early Renaissance to words from the *Song of Songs*: *As the lily among the thorns, so is my love among the daughters.*

Ecce sacerdos

Tomás Luis de Victoria (1548 – 1611)

A majestic antiphon setting by the best-loved Spanish composer of the later Renaissance: *Behold a great priest, who in his days pleased God, and was found righteous.*

O Sanctissima Maria

Paul Mealor (1975 –)

Paul Mealor wrote this motet for the Chapel Choir of King's College, Aberdeen in 2011: *O most holy, o most loving, sweet Virgin Mary. Beloved Mother, undefiled, pray for us. Amen.*

A Remembrance

Simon Beattie (1975 –)

Both words and music were written by Simon and first performed by the Damon Singers in 2018. It is inspired by the story of a Chesham man, Sydney Lacey, who died on the Western Front in 1916.



Insbruch ich muss dich lassen

Heinrich Isaac (c.1450 – 1517)

Adieu! my native shore

Robert Lucas Pearsall (1795 – 1856)

Like Vaughan Williams, Pearsall was strongly influenced by music of the Tudor and earlier periods. Isaac's farewell to Innsbruck and to his beloved was one of the most popular songs of the early 16th century. *Innsbruck, I must leave you. I will go my way to foreign land(s). My joy has been taken away from me.* Three centuries later Pearsall effectively recomposed the song, employing a lyric by Byron, to lament his own frequent departures from the white cliffs of Dover for his home in Switzerland.

Ae fond kiss

Paul Mealor

Ae Fond Kiss was Mealor's contribution to a series of new settings of Robert Burns poems, to raise money for the Ballater Flood Appeal in 2016. Burns wrote the poem after his final meeting with Agnes Macle hose in 1791.

The Road Home

Stephen Paulus (1949 – 2014)

Stephen Paulus has adapted the traditional hymn tune *Prospect* from *Southern Harmony* originally compiled by William "Singin' Billy" Walker in 1835. The heartfelt words were provided, at Stephen's request, by the librettist Michael Dennis Browne in 2000.



Marianne

arr. Philip Wilby (b.1949)

This song appeared in nineteenth-century broadsides and was subsequently collected in the North Country, Canada and the US. It tells of a sailor's sadness at leaving his true love ashore as he sets sail.

As Torrents in Summer

Sir Edward Elgar (1857 – 1934)

From Elgar's dramatic cantata *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf* setting words by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.



Three Elizabethan Partsongs

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872 – 1958)

Images of Vaughan Williams usually portray him in somewhat corpulent old age, often in ill-fitting tweeds, occasionally brandishing an ear trumpet... However, these three songs date from the other end of his career, composed during his years at the RCM in his late teens and early twenties (1891 and 1895, though not published until 1913) when he cut a far more dashing figure. Even at this stage, the directness and simplicity of the harmonic language used in these short songs, influenced by much earlier composers, stands in stark contrast to the rich chromaticism of most music of the 1890s and already suggests a very different musical future.

Sweet Day: A setting of words by George Herbert (1593 – 1633) who was in fact only nine when the Elizabethan age ended... The poem contrasts the fleeting nature of a day or even a season with the immortality of the 'sweet and virtuous soul'.

The Willow Song: Desdemona's prophetically sad song from Shakespeare's *Othello*.

O Mistress Mine: Feste's song from *Twelfth Night* urges his mistress to kiss him while youth lasts.



Tequila Samba

Guy Turner (b. 1955)

Guy Turner is a freelance composer and performer, as well as a lay clerk at Southwell Minster. He has written a range of choral music, both silly and serious. We leave you to judge which category this falls under.

The Mermaid

Arr. John Whitworth (1921 – 2013)

In *The Dark Eyed Sailor* the basses briefly visited the bottom of the sea. Now they revisit it (a tone lower...) in this lively arrangement of a sailors' ballad in which an unfortunate mariner falls overboard but finds possibly bigamous marital bliss with a mermaid to the strains of a favourite from the Last Night of the Proms.



The Damon Singers

Musical Director: David Cooke

Soprano

Ann Crisp
Jane Featherstone-Witty
Dorothy Freedman
Sophie Hamilton
Sarah How
Claire Hunter
Rachel Meldrum

Alto

Caroline Greenwood
Marianne Michael
Liz Sheppard
Madeleine Symes
Karen van Oostrum
Uli Wright

Tenor

Simon Beattie
David Freedman
Duncan Passey
Chris Turner

Bass

Keith Armstrong
Martin Cunningham
Sebastian Gibbs
David Harmer
Jeremy Moodey
Andrew Scott