



CELEBRATIONS - THE DAMON SINGERS SUMMER PUDDING CONCERT 2023 Christ Church, Waterside, Chesham on July 1st at 7.30pm

Two themes run through tonight's programme; we commemorate several musical anniversaries that fall in 2023 and we celebrate the sheer joy of singing.

Choir: *Sing Joyfully*

William Byrd (1543 – 1623)

We start as we mean to go on with *Sing Joyfully*, a splendid anthem composed by one of the composers whose anniversaries are celebrated in today's programme. William Byrd is acknowledged as one of the greatest composers of the Renaissance and this has been his most popular English anthem both in his lifetime and in the 400 years since. The words are from Psalm 81 "*Sing joyfully unto God our strength*". Listen out for the "*trumpet in the new moon*" which Byrd captures with some particularly vivid word-painting.

Choir: *Choral Dances from Gloriana*

Benjamin Britten (1913 – 1976)

Britten's opera, *Gloriana*, was first performed at a gala event at the Royal Opera House in 1953, in honour of the late Queen's coronation just six days before. We first sang the set in 2002, to mark the Golden Jubilee and again at our 60th anniversary concert in 2017. The libretto of *Gloriana* was by the author and editor (and dedicatee of Ian Fleming's *Goldfinger*) William Plomer (1903-1973). The six 'dances' you will hear tonight open the second act, and portray a colourful masque of 'Time and Concord' attended by Elizabeth I in Norwich. They are: 1. *Time*; 2. *Concord*; 3. *Time and Concord*; 4. *Country Girls*; 5. *Rustics and Fishermen*; 6. *Final Dance of Homage*. Time is portrayed as a lusty youth, in his prime, while his wife, Concord, blesses the land with plenty, peace and happiness. In *Time and Concord*, this plenty is attributed to the Queen, Gloriana, who "*hath all our love*". Country girls offer garlands for the Queen, while the men bring samples of their country largesse and all finally join to ask the Queen to accept their gifts so that "*you afar may feel us near*".

Reading: 'When I get up from my chair' by Pam Ayres

Read by Karen van Oostrum

Choir: *Set me as a Seal*

René Clausen (b.1953)

As well as composing, Clausen was conductor of the Concordia Choir, Minnesota for many years. Originally part of the 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: "*Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death*".

Choir: *Hymn to the Eternal Flame*

Stephen Paulus (1949 – 2014)

Soprano solo: Rachel Meldrum

Stephen Paulus was a Grammy-winning American composer whose *Pilgrims' Hymn*, a Damons' favourite, was sung at the funerals of both Ronald Reagan and Gerald Ford. *Hymn to the Eternal Flame* is a movement from the oratorio, *To be Certain of the Dawn*, a Holocaust memorial oratorio, rooted in themes and subjects of interest to both Jewish and Christian communities, nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. The text is by the US-based English poet and librettist, Michael Dennis Browne. "*Every face is in you, every voice, every sorrow in you. Every pity, every love, every memory, woven into fire*".

Small group: *Ah, Robin*

William Cornysh (the younger, d. 1523)

Simon Beattie, David Freedman, Martin Cunningham

Cornysh, whose 500th anniversary falls this year, pursued a multi-faceted career as musician, poet, actor, entrepreneur and Gentleman of the Chapel Royal, interrupted only by a short spell in prison for an unknown offence in 1504. *Ah Robin* appears in the *Henry VIII manuscript* (c. 1518), a collection of songs and music to be performed at court. The text is attributed to Sir Thomas Wyatt (c. 1503 – 1542), the poet and diplomat who introduced the sonnet to England. In this three-part song, the two lower voices repeat a two-part phrase "*Ah, Robin, gentle Robin, tell me how thy leman (lover) doth and thou shalt know of mine*". Above this, the tenor sings two verses, one in which the lady is unkind and loves another and then a reply, presumably by Robin, whose lady loves him well and "*will change for no new*". Let's hope they're not discussing the same lady...

Choir: Hark, All ye Lovely Saints

Thomas Weelkes (c. 1575 – 1623)

Our final anniversary is that of Thomas Weelkes who, like William Byrd, died 400 years ago. His life was somewhat shorter than Byrd's, blighted in later years by alcoholism, but his output of both sacred and secular vocal music stands comparison with the best. He spent much of his career at Chichester Cathedral as organist and Master of the Choristers. In this light-hearted madrigal the goddess Diana has persuaded Cupid to break and burn his bow so that ladies will no longer have to weep for love. Ah, if only...

Reading: 'Chocolate Cake' by Michael Rosen

Read by Marianne Michael

Small group: Sweet and Low

Joseph Barnby (1838 – 1896)

Liz Sheppard, Karen van Oostrum, David Freedman, Simon Beattie, Martin Cunningham, Keith Armstrong

Barnby played a prominent, and largely progressive, role in the musical life of Victorian London, promoting the latest music from the Continent, helping revive the music of JS Bach and, in 1864, supervising the first performance of liturgical music by a woman (Alice Mary Smith) in the Church of England. The text of *Sweet and Low* is from a longer poem, *The Princess*, by Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809 – 1892). In this wholesomely sentimental setting, a mother lulls her baby to sleep, promising that the wind of the western sea will soon blow Father home again. Do listen out for the gently rolling waters...

Choir: Birthday Madrigals

John Rutter (b.1945)

1. *It was a lover and his lass*; 4. *My true love hath my heart*; 5. *When daisies pied*

Well, perhaps one more anniversary of sorts... John Rutter wrote his five Birthday Madrigals at the invitation of Brian Kay, conductor of the Cheltenham Bach Choir, to celebrate the 75th birthday of the great jazz pianist, George Shearing, in 1995. Tonight we perform three from the set. The words come from 1. *As You Like It*; 2. Sir Philip Sidney's great *Arcadia* (1590); and 3. *Love's Labour's Lost*, with an additional verse from *The Old Wives' Tale* (1595) by George Peele.

Choir: Sing to the Moon

Laura Mvula (b. 1986) and Steven James Brown (b. 1958)

Soprano solo: Rachel Meldrum

Laura Mvula is impossible to categorise. Born in Birmingham she is classically trained in composition and sings in genres ranging across soul, gospel, jazz and R&B. *Sing to the Moon* is the title song on her debut album and she has described its inspiration. "It came from a time when I was reading a book called '*Underneath a Harlem Moon*', a biography of jazz singer Adelaide Hall, about how she didn't get the recognition she perhaps deserved. She describes her close relationship with her father where she talks about how he used to say to her 'Sing to the moon and the stars will shine'. For some reason it just struck some kind of chord with me. And so because of that, it then became a saying that I liked to use myself". Steve Brown is a British composer, lyricist, arranger and record producer with a particular flair for comedy. His music has been heard in numerous television shows and some may remember him as the fictional bandleader Glen Ponder in Steve Coogan's *Knowing Me Knowing You with Alan Partridge*.

Choir: Sourwood Mountain

Trad arr. John Rutter

Soloists: Simon Beattie and Keith Armstrong

What better way to end an evening celebrating the joy of singing than a good old Tennessee folk song arranged bluegrass style? Is there a clawhammer banjo player in the house? Yeehaw!

The Damon Singers:**Musical Director,** David Cooke**Soprano**Coral Ash
Jane Featherstone-Witty
Dorothy Freedman
Sophie Hamilton
Claire Hunter
Rachel Meldrum**Alto**Caroline Greenwood
Erika Lukacs
Marianne Michael
Neta Morrag
Louise Pearce
Liz Sheppard
Karen van Oostrum
Uli Wright**Tenor**Simon Beattie
David Freedman
Duncan Passey
Chris Turner**Baritone**Martin Cunningham
Andrew Scott**Bass**Keith Armstrong
Sebastian Gibbs
David Harmer