



THE WORLD TO ME

THE DAMON SINGERS and special guest SIMON PEARCE (guitar)
The United Reformed Church, Chesham, Sat Apr 26th 2025 at 7.30pm

Three Nonsense Songs:

Mátyás Seiber (1905-1960)

1. There was an old Lady of France

The Hungarian composer Mátyás Seiber moved to the UK in 1935, eventually becoming a British citizen. His music encompasses a bewildering variety of genres including operas, string quartets, film music and even a top twenty hit (*By the Fountains of Rome*). A robust sense of humour was often evident in his music. The Three Nonsense Songs of 1956 take limericks by Edward Lear, all featuring eccentric elderly folk, and graphically capture their surreal silliness. In the first, a French lady teaches ducklings to dance but surprisingly is upset when they quack. More after the interval...

O Vos Omnes

Pau Casals (1876-1973)

Thought by many to be the greatest cellist of the twentieth century, the Catalan Pau (Pablo) Casals was also an accomplished composer, as can be heard in this motet composed in 1932. It was one of several pieces he wrote for the Benedictine monks of the Abbey of Montserrat near his native city of Barcelona - although he never returned to Spain following the victory in 1939 of Francisco Franco's Nationalist forces in the Spanish Civil War. Originally for men's voices, Casals recast the motet for mixed choir in 1965.

*O vos ómnes qui transítis per víam,
atténdite et vidéte: si est dólór sícút dólór
méus.*

O all you who walk by on the road, pay
attention and see: if there can be any sorrow
as mine.

O Sacrum Convivium

Cristóbal de Morales (c.1500-1553)

Unlike the more recent composers surrounding him in this section of the concert, Morales was not forced by political circumstances to spend the latter part of his life in exile. In fact, except for a period in Rome, he spent the greater part of his life in the service of Spanish cathedrals including Avila and Malaga. Here he sets the antiphon to the Magnificat for Second Vespers of Corpus Christi using varied imitation to weave a sonorous tapestry of interlocked phrases. Its spacious polyphony served as inspiration for Palestrina's later Mass setting (*Missa O Sacrum Convivium*).

*O sacrum convivium, in quo Christus
sumitur; recolitur memoria passionis ejus;
mens impletur gratia; et futurae gloriae
nobis pignus datur. Alleluia.*

O sacred banquet, wherein Christ is received;
the memorial of his passion is renewed; the
soul is filled with grace; and a pledge of
future glory is given to us. Alleluia.

Tebe Poem

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

This piece is from Rachmaninov's 1910 setting of the Orthodox Liturgy of St John Chrysostom. It is a hymn concluding the consecration, the part of the Divine Liturgy during which the bread and wine on the altar are believed to be transformed into the blood and body of Christ. The sanctity of this moment is mirrored in Rachmaninov's injunction "very slowly and barely audible".

*Tebe poem Tebe blagoslovim Tebe
blagodarim, Gospodi i molim Ti sia,
Bozhe nash.*

*We sing to you, we praise you, we thank you,
O Lord, and we pray to you, our God.*



Platero y yo (Platero and I)

Eduardo Sainz de la Maza (1903-1982)

(Simon Pearce, guitar; Ann Crisp, reader)

Simon will be performing four movements, two in each half of the concert, from a charming suite by the Spanish composer and guitarist Eduardo Sainz de la Maza. Written in 1968, it is inspired by a set of 138 prose-poems that Nobel Prize-winning Spanish author Juan Ramón Jiménez (1881-1958) wrote from 1906 onwards describing the activities of Platero, a pet donkey. Sainz de la Maza chose eight of these prose-poems as a basis for his suite. The poems will be read by Ann Crisp before each section of this delightful and moving Andalusian-inspired music.

I. Platero describes the donkey, 'small, downy, and smooth', running to the meadow, brushing his nose against the flowers of 'pink, sky-blue and golden yellow'.

V. Paseo ('Ride') in which the poet rides Platero through summer paths lined with honeysuckle, the donkey occasionally nibbling at the sparse grass. The blueness of the sky gives the writer great joy. But soon the ride ends as they hear the rattle of the well chain. Both the narrator and Platero enjoy a drink of water; 'that liquid snow'.



The World to me

Simon Beattie (b. 1975)

Simon writes "Its text is the poem 'World' from Carol Ann Duffy's 2005 book *Rapture*, words I had actually wanted to set for a long time before I finally wrote the piece in 2017. I first came across the poem when Duffy was made Poet Laureate in 2009. I had never read any of her work when her appointment was announced, so was pleasantly surprised when I found, on a transatlantic flight, that Juliet Stevenson reading *Rapture* was among British Airways' inflight entertainment choices. I was flying to the US for a week, away from home, and the poem resonated—and stayed—with me".

Great God of Love

Robert Lucas Pearsall (1795-1856)

Pearsall lived abroad for many years but kept in touch with his home city of Bristol, in part by writing many pieces for its flourishing Madrigal Society. In this eight-part 'madrigal', from 1839 (over two centuries after the madrigal's Golden Age), you can hear some of the sumptuous harmonies he went on to employ the following year in the famous *Lay a garland* (long a Damons' favourite). The words, a call to Cupid to inspire Amaryllyis with the same love the poet feels for her, are the composer's own.

Three Heine Love Songs

Simon Beattie

1. Rose, Lily, Sun, Dove (tr P.G.L. Webb); 2. Songless (tr Louis Untermeyer); 3. Exercise in Love (tr Aaron Kramer)

Simon writes "I wrote these back in 2009, when they were premiered by the Damon Singers. The text for the third was one of the readings at our wedding (my wife and I both studied modern languages at university). Having discovered it, I read more of Heine's work, and found two more poems of his I wanted to set".

Benedicimus Deum Caeli

James MacMillan (b. 1959)

James MacMillan is one of the foremost Scottish classical composers of his generation. His music is inspired both by his Catholic faith and his political beliefs. This 'ecstatic' six-part communion motet setting words from the Book of Tobias was written for the Strathclyde University Chamber Choir in 2010.

Benedicimus Deum cæli, et coram
omnibus viventibus confitebimur ei;
quia fecit nobiscum misericordiam suam.

Let us bless the God of heaven
and utter his praises before all who live; for he
has dealt with us according to his mercy.

INTERVAL

Three Nonsense Songs:

Mátyás Seiber

2. There was an Old Person of Cromer; 3. There was an Old Man in a tree

In the first of these two Nonsense Songs an old man, having grown stiff through reading Homer on one leg, throws himself off a cliff and, not unexpectedly, expires, while in the second another old man, inexplicably in a tree, is bored by a bee, depicted by Seiber with irritatingly buzzing energy.

Otche nash

Anton Arensky (1861-1906)

The Lord's Prayer is one of the few sacred works composed by Anton Arensky, and is part of his "Four Sacred Choruses," Opus 40, from the "Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom." Arensky, a student of Rimsky-Korsakov, uses subtle harmonic colourations to adorn the text in this homophonic prayer. The range for all voices is moderate to low, and, as in much of Russian liturgical music, the bass line forms the foundation of the piece, often descending to a low C.

Otche Nash, lzhe esi na nebesekh,
da sviatitsia imia Tvoe,
da priidet Tsarstvie Tvoe:
da budet volia Tvoia,
iako na nebesi i na zemli.
Khleb nash nasushchnyi dazhd' nam
dnes';
i ostavi nam dolgi nasha,
iako zhe i my ostavliaem dolzhnikom
nashim;
i ne vvedi nas vo iskushenie,
no izbavi nas ot lukavago.
Iako Tvoe est' Tsarstvo, i sila, i slava
Ottsa, i Syna, i Sviatago Dukha,
nyne i prisno i vo veki vekov. Amin'.

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done
on earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
But deliver us from the Evil One: For thine is
the kingdom, the power, and the glory
of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy
Spirit,
now, and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.*

Red River Valley

arr. Jeffrey Douma (b. 1972)

Jeffrey Douma has been director of the Yale Glee Club since 2003 and this arrangement of a beloved Canadian folk song was premiered by them in 2006. It refers to a river that flows north between Minnesota and North Dakota into Lake Winnipeg and expresses a text readily understood by anyone who has had to bid farewell too soon to a loved one.



Platero y yo (Platero and I)

Eduardo Sainz De La Maza

(Simon Pearce, guitar; Ann Crisp, reader)

III. **La azotea ('The Roof Terrace')** is a place where Platero cannot go, but from the terrace one can hear the bells ringing, and there is a view over the vineyards. Also to be seen are a slow boat on the river, a girl singing while she combs her hair, and Platero drinking at the water trough.

VII. **La muerte ('Death')** finds Platero stretched out on his bed of straw, unable to stand up. Platero's doctor, Darbón, is in attendance and says nothing can be done, the cause of his malady possibly being a poisonous root. By noon Platero has died, his belly swollen up like a globe. At the end, a beautiful butterfly flies through the ray of sunlight coming from the tiny window, its three colours shining.



The Cherubic Hymn

Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857)

The young Glinka, Russia's first great composer, wrote this work (setting a text from the Orthodox Liturgy) in 1837, the year Tsar Nicholas I appointed him *Kapellmeister* to the Imperial Court Chapel.

*Izhe kheruvimi tayno obrazuyushche,
i zivotvoryashchey Trojtsye
trisvyatuyu pyesn pripyevayushche.
Vsyakoye ninye zhityeskoye otlozhim
popyecheniye. Amin.
Vlasti vsyekh pravoslavnykh Khristian, da
po mnye ot Gospod Bogu o Tsarstvii
svoyem, vsyegda amin i prissno, i vo vyeki
vyekov.
Yako da Tsarya vsyekh podimyem!
Angelskimi nyevidimo dorinosima chinmi,
Alliluia!*

We who in a mystery represent the Cherubim
and sing the thrice-holy hymn to the life-
giving Trinity,
Now as we draw near thy throne of grace let
us now lay aside the cares of this life. Amen.
By the authority of all Orthodox Christians,
granted to me from the Lord God with His
kingdom, so be it always and for ever, and
from age unto age.
That we may receive the King of All,
invisibly escorted by the hosts of angels.
Alleluia.

Bonny at Morn

Trad arr. Jeremy Summerly (b. 1961)

This Northumbrian folksong is part lullaby, part reproach to a lazy son who is clearly not pulling his weight on the farm. It was arranged for the Palestine Choral Festival by the conductor, lecturer and frequent contributor to Radio 3, Jeremy Summerly.

Theme from "The Pink Panther"

Henry Mancini (1924-1994) arr. Hans Kaldewey

This number probably requires no introduction. It also requires no words from the choir much beyond "ya ba doot, baw, baw, wah", though do listen out for the basses' rangy "dum tsums" from time to time...

END

Simon Pearce

Simon graduated from the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama with a First Class Degree in music. Supported by an RCM scholarship, he achieved a distinction in his Master's Degree at The Royal College of Music. He has a large teaching practice working privately and at local schools, and is a highly regarded classical guitar performer playing at venues across England and Wales.

The Damon Singers

Musical Director: David Cooke

Soprano

Ann Crisp
Claire Ellerton
Dorothy Freedman
Sarah How
Claire Hunter
Rachel Meldrum*
Emma Summers

Alto

Caroline Greenwood
Erika Lukacs
Louise Pearce
Liz Sheppard
Madeleine Symes
Karen van Oostrum
Uli Wright

Tenor

Simon Beattie*
David Freedman
Duncan Passey
Chris Turner

Baritone/Bass

Keith Armstrong
John-Paul Bowman
Martin Cunningham
Sebastian Gibbs
David Harmer
Andrew Scott

***Soloist**

Notes by Martin Cunningham and Simon Beattie