



PUDDING CONCERT - SING WE AND CHANT IT!



THE DAMON SINGERS

At Christ Church, Waterside, Chesham on Sat Jul 19th 2025 at 7.30pm

This summer the Damons are celebrating the joy of singing itself with a programme built around two settings of *Sing We and Chant It*. Following the performance, we can then celebrate the joy of calories as we serve (and eat...) delicious home-made puddings. Please await instructions...

Sing we and chant it

Thomas Morley (1557-1602)

Published in Morley's 1595 *First Book of Ballets*, this much-loved piece captures perfectly the lighter side of the English madrigal with its *fa la la* refrain. Its hedonistic refrain exhorts us to *live in pleasure* while we still can, which seems particularly appropriate for a pudding concert...

Birthday madrigals

Sir John Rutter (b1945)

4. My true love hath my heart; 1. It was a lover and his lass

Rutter wrote his five Birthday Madrigals at the invitation of Brian Kay, conductor of the Cheltenham Bach Choir, to celebrate the 75th birthday of jazz pianist, George Shearing, in 1995. Tonight, we perform two from the set. The words of our first, *My true love hath my heart and I have his*, come from Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (1590) while the text of our second is from Shakespeare's *As you like it*.

A que por muy gran fremosura

attrib. Alfonso X (1221-1284)

Sung by Rachel Meldrum

By far the earliest music in this programme, this song is from the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, a late-medieval collection of over four hundred Galician-Portuguese songs dedicated to the Virgin Mary. They were composed, according to tradition, by Alfonso X, known as *El Sabio* (The Wise), King of Castile and León from 1252, although most are likely to have been by the poets and musicians of his court. Many of the songs recount miracles ascribed to the Virgin and this one tells of a pious monk who was particularly devoted to the Virgin, always writing her name in three colours - gold, blue and rose. When he fell fatally ill the Virgin Mary appeared at his bedside urging him not to fear and, on his death, delivered his soul to Paradise.

Dum medium silentium (In quiet silence)

John-Paul Bowman (b.1985)

John-Paul's English setting of this Introit text, composed in 2011, perfectly captures the halting silence of the middle of the night before the Word of God descends from Heaven in a powerful climax. The quiet of the night is then restored before all turns, quite literally, to silence.

O sanctissima Maria

Paul Mealor (b.1975)

Paul Mealor is a Welsh composer and teacher who came to national prominence when his motet *Ubi Caritas et Amor* was performed at the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton. *O Sanctissima Maria* was also written in 2011 for the Chapel Choir of King's College, Aberdeen, part of the university where Mealor was Professor of Composition. *O most holy, O most loving, sweet Virgin Mary, beloved Mother, undefiled pray, pray for us.*

Reading: Today I feel euphorian by Ogden Nash

Read by Ann Crisp

Sing we and chant it

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. This was one of his tributes to the Elizabethan madrigal school, setting the same words as Morley, but expanding the setting to 8 voices arranged in two choirs. Listen how some of the sopranos are so keen to get *fa la la*-ing, they frequently jump in ahead of everyone else.

Bushes and briars

Traditional arr. Donald James

On 4 December 1903, Ralph Vaughan Williams, on his first folk-song collecting excursion, was a slightly apprehensive attendee of a tea-party given by the vicar of Ingrave, Essex, where he hoped to meet a few villagers who might know some songs. Charles Potiphar, a 72-year-old shepherd and labourer, sang the haunting melody of *Bushes and briars*, saying 'If you can get the words, the Almighty will send you the tune.' Vaughan Williams noted only the first verse, later completing the text from a broadside, but so profound was the encounter he later recalled that he felt the melody was something he had known all his life.

Reading: The good-morrow by John Donne

Read by Ann Crisp

Sure on this shining night

Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

Sung by Rachel Meldrum with David Cooke (piano)

From his 1938 song cycle *Four Songs*, Barber sets part of *Descriptions of Elysium* by the American writer James Agee (1909-1955). Its contemplative, nostalgic mood shares characteristics with *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, another, more extensive, Barber/Agee composition. And yet this is achieved within a carefully crafted structure with voice and accompaniment in canon with each other. *Sure on this shining night of starmade shadows round, Kindness must watch for me this side the ground. The late year lies down the north. All is healed, All is health. High summer holds the Earth. Hearts are whole. Sure on this shining night, I weep for wonder - wandering far alone of shadows on the stars.*

Deep river

Spiritual arr. Brian Trant

This affecting arrangement of a much-loved spiritual is by the composer and conductor of the once-famous Mellow Lane School Choir, Hayes, and was first published in 1960.

Xicochi xicochi

Gaspar Fernandes (1566–1629)

The Portuguese composer and organist Gaspar Fernandes started his career as a singer at the Cathedral of Évora in Portugal before moving first to the cathedral of Santiago de Guatemala and then, in 1606, to the cathedral of Puebla in Mexico as choir master. There he composed many liturgical *villancicos* incorporating vernacular languages and musical styles. Xicochi is a lullaby for the Christ child notable for its use of Nahuatl, the language of the indigenous Nahua people. *Sleep, sleep, precious baby. Indeed, the angels have come here to rock you to sleep. Alleluia.*

Siyahamba

Zulu hymn arr. Anders Nyberg

This hymn may well have existed in an oral form before 1952, when Andries van Tonder (1882–1955) Elder of the Judith Church of Dundee, Natal, either transcribed or perhaps even composed it. In 1984 it was arranged by the Swedish composer and conductor Anders Nyberg (b.1955) for four voices and disseminated internationally after which it became strongly associated with the anti-apartheid movement. *Siyahamba ekukhanyeni kwenkos' (We are marching in the light of God).*

Esti dal (Evening song)

Traditional Hungarian arr. Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967)

Esti dal translates as 'Evening Song' and is perhaps Kodály's most famous choral work. It is a setting of a folk-song from Northern Hungary in which a young soldier fighting for the Austro-Hungarian Empire prays to God for shelter and safe-keeping through another night in a foreign land. *Evening darkness overtook me near the woods; I have put my coat under my head, I have put my hands together to pray to the Lord: Oh, my Lord, give me a place to sleep, I am weary with wandering, With walking around and hiding, With living on foreign land. May Lord give me a good night, May he send me a holy angel, May he encourage our hearts' dreams, May he give us a good night.*

That lonesome road

James Taylor (b. 1948) and Don Grolnick (1947–1996)

arr. Simon Carrington

In James Taylor's own words: 'It's just a long, hard lonely slog being constantly human and having the responsibility of having to reinvent the world every second. It is a lonesome road. So that's a type of song I write too'. Don't worry though, the next few songs should cheer you up...

Among the leaves so green

Folk Song arr. John Byrt

Originating as far back as a ballad of the 1680s, *The Huntsman's Delight*, the text of this folk song as first notated by Cecil Sharp in 1909, from a Robert Kinchin at Ilmington, Warwickshire, was somewhat racier than the standard version. The does were clearly young women pursued, with some degree of success, by an amorous gamekeeper (*O and he tickled her in a merry vein, For she's amongst the leaves of the green O*). The version published by Sharp in 1916 implies a more innocent, if bloodthirsty, chase.

Black Sheep

Traditional arr. John Rutter

This traditional American lullaby was collected by the prolific Texan ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax (1915–2002), known both for his numerous field recordings of folk music

across America and Europe and for his political activism. This arrangement by John Rutter is from his 1976 collection *Three American Folk Songs*.

The bassoon

J Quenton Ashlyn (1858–1933)

Performed by David Harmer and Keith Armstrong

J. Quenton Ashlyn may have been the pseudonym of society entertainer Frank Kennedy... He published a number of songs including the intriguingly titled *Very embarrassing, very!* *The bassoon* was first performed by him in Portsmouth Town Hall in 1900 and, in the words of bassoonist Laurence Perkins, 'establishes beyond doubt the role of the bassoon as the leading instrument in the orchestra, a valuable asset when wooing your lover and a vital accessory around the home'... Ashlyn later gave up the theatrical life in 1905 after becoming a committed Christian.

Dashing away with the smoothing iron

Traditional arr. John Rutter

This folk song about a man admiring the woman he loves as she goes through daily stages of washing and ironing clothes was collected several times by Cecil Sharp. The now standard version is an amalgam of words from Captain Lewis of Minehead, Somerset (1909), Mrs Louie Hooper of Hambridge, Somerset (1904) and Mrs Jane Gulliford of Combe Florey, Somerset (1908). This arrangement by John Rutter is from his 1978 set of *Five Traditional Songs*.

Old McDonald had a farm

Traditional arr. George Mitchell (1917–2002)

It may seem quite unnecessary to write anything about such a well-known, though not universally beloved, children's song. But that would be wrong... Let me refer you to its fascinating Wikipedia entry where you can learn about Thomas d'Urfey's 1706 opera *The Kingdom of the Sun*, Gid Tanner and his Skillet Lickers, 74-year-old Mrs. Goodey singing in the Marylebone Workhouse in 1908, and *The Farmyard Song*, adapted by Aaron Copland as *I Bought Me a Cat* and arranged, in a very silly way, by Vaughan Williams! Those of us young enough to remember the Mitchell Minstrels will be familiar with the George Mitchell style, typified by this classic arrangement.

The Damon Singers

Musical Director: David Cooke

Soprano

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

Alto

Claire Ellerton
Caroline Greenwood*
Erika Lukács
Louise Pearce
Uli Wright

Tenor

Simon Beattie*
David Freedman
Duncan Passey
Chris Turner

Baritone/Bass

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

Percussion and voice: Alison Davidson

*Soloist; **Presenter

Programme Notes: Martin Cunningham