



NATURE'S VOICE: THE DAMON SINGERS PUDDING CONCERT 2026

with special guests THE GILLYBILLIES

Christ Church, Waterside, Chesham: Sat July 18th, at 7.30pm

Following David Attenborough's hundredth birthday, it seemed only appropriate that we should turn our musical and poetic attention to the natural world. In tonight's programme we move from the stillness of the night and the shimmering of stars through landscapes, seascapes, trees and flowers to birds, insects and a variety of other animals, some the products of imagination rather than nature.

And, after a musical cornucopia, what could be more natural than the consumption of delicious puddings? For this, please await instructions...

---- A Musical(?) Menagerie ----

Contrapunto Bestiale

Adriano Banchieri (1568-1634)

Born in Bologna, Banchieri was a versatile composer, organist, theorist and dramatist who entered the Olivetan monastic order in his twenties. He wrote both sacred and secular music, the latter often drawing upon the themes and characters of the traditional Italian commedia dell'arte. The 'Contrapunto Bestiale' is from *Festino nella sera del giovedì grasso avanti cena* (*Entertainment for the Eve of Carnival Thursday before Dinner*) published in Venice in 1608. We will introduce it using words from the previous piece in the *Festina*. The basses provide a nonsensical musical foundation rather appropriately in so-called dog-Latin.

---- Night and Day, Flowers and Trees ----

Two Choruses: 1. Calme des Nuits; 2. Les Fleurs et les Arbres

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)

These two contrasting choruses celebrating the magnificence and beauty of nature and the love of art were first published in 1883.

*Calme des nuits, fraîcheur des soirs,
Vaste scintillement des mondes,
Grand silence des antres noirs
Vous charmez les âmes profondes.
L'éclat du soleil, la gaité,
Le bruit plaisent aux plus futiles;
Le poète seul est hanté
Par l'amour des choses tranquilles.*

Stillness of the night, cool of the evening,
Vast shimmering of the spheres,
Great silence of black vaults
Deep thinkers delight in you.
The bright sun, merriment,
And noise amuse the more frivolous;
Only the poet is possessed
By the love of quiet things.

*Les fleurs et les arbres,
Les bronzes, les marbres,
Les ors, les émaux,
La mer, les fontaines,
Les monts et les plaines
Consolent nos maux.*

The flowers and the trees,
The bronzes, the marbles,
The golds, the enamels,
The sea, the fountains (waterfalls),
The mountains and the plains
Console our pain.

*Nature éternelle, tu sembles plus belle
Au sein des douleurs, et l'art nous domine,
Sa flame illumine le rire et les pleurs.*

Eternal nature, you seem more beautiful
To a heart in sorrow, and art reigns over us,
Its flame illuminates the laughter and tears.

Linden Lea

Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) arr. Arthur Somervell (1863-1937)

Vaughan Williams wrote this famous song in 1901, a setting of words by the Dorset dialect poet William Barnes, celebrating the joy and freedom of nature in contrast to the 'dark-room'd town'. Originally scored for voice and piano, it was arranged for mixed voices in 1912.

Reading: Oak

Robert Macfarlane (read by Karen van Oostrum)

---- Sacred Nature ----

Sicut Cervus

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525-1594)

Possibly Palestrina's most famous motet, and long-appreciated as a model of Renaissance polyphony, this four-part composition perfectly captures the feeling of longing (*desiderat*) and the flowing of streams.

*Sicut cervus desiderat ad fontes aquarum,
ita desiderat anima mea ad te, Deus.*

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so longs
my soul for you, O God.

Ego Flos Campi

Jacob Handl (1550-1591)

This will be a rare modern performance of a little-known motet by the Slovenian composer Jacob Handl, also known as Jacobus Gallus. Appropriately for our theme, his surname translates as rooster or cockerel! The text from the *Song of Songs*, one frequently set by renaissance composers, was thought to describe sacred love in terms of the natural world. Listen out for more flowing streams towards the end of the piece.

*Ego flos campi et lilium convallium.
Sicut lilium inter spinas sic amica mea inter filias.*

I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.
As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

*Sicut malus inter ligna silvarum, sic dilectus meus
inter filios.*

As the apple tree among the trees of the wood,
so is my beloved among the sons.

*Hortus conclusus soror mea sponsa, hortus
conclusus fons signatus.*

A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a
spring shut up, a fountain sealed.

*Fons hortorum puteus aquarum viventium quae
fluunt impetu de Libano.*

A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and
streams from Lebanon.

---- Love and Nature ----

Margot Labourez les Vignes

Jacob (Jacques) Arcadelt (1507-1568)

A prolific composer of Italian madrigals, French chansons and sacred music, Arcadelt was born in Namur in the Habsburg Netherlands (now Belgium) and worked extensively in Italy and France. Both the words and music of *Margot* have the feel of a folk-song. Ostensibly carefree, there is perhaps a hint of sadness towards the end – could it really have been the king's son who gave her a bouquet and what will happen to her if he proves false and the flowers, perhaps inevitably, die? We try to reflect this in our interpretation, hopefully without diverting too much from the predominantly cheerful character of the music.

Refrain:

*Margot labourez les vignes
Vignes, vignes, vignolez,
Margot labourez les vignes bientôt*

Margot, work the vines!
Vines, vines, little vines,
Margot, work the vines!

Verses:

*En revenant de Lorraine, Rencontrai trois Capitaines,
Ils m'ont appele vilaine, Je ne suis pas si vilaine,
Puisque le fils de roi m'aime, Il m'a donne pour
etrenne, Un bouquet de Marjolaine,
S'il fleurit, je serais reine. S'il y meurt, je perds ma
peine.*

Returning from Lorraine, I met three Captains,
They called me a peasant, I am not a peasant,
Because the king's son loves me, He gave me
as a gift, A bouquet of marjoram,
If it flowers, I'll be queen. If it dies, I've wasted
all my effort.

She's Like the Swallow

Folk-song arr. Edward T. Chapman

This folk-song from Newfoundland was first collected in 1930 by the British ethnomusicologist (and folk dancer *par excellence*) Maud Karpeles and published in her *Folk Songs from Newfoundland* four years later. The beautiful melody accompanies a sad tale of heart-break and lost love. Let's hope Margot's fate was happier than the swallow's...

---- Flying, Jumping and Singing ----

Reading: A bird, came down the walk

Emily Dickinson (read by Uli Wright)

Of All the Birds

John Bartlet (fl. 1606-1610)

Little is known about John Bartlet. He was employed as a musician by Sir Edward Seymour, Earl Hertford and his only publication was *A Booke of Ayres with a Triplicite of Musicke*, published in 1606. However, his music was widely popular in its time, appearing in many later manuscripts and prints. The rather suggestive lyrics of this piece might suggest why. What is really going on here? How many birds have lips, teeth and tongue? And do they go to bed...??

Reading: Moth

Robert Macfarlane (read by Caroline Greenwood)

El Grillo

attrib. Josquin des Prez (c.1450-1521)

This upbeat, cheerful piece is almost certainly not by Josquin... For one thing, it's far too cheerful! It's composed in the style of a frottola, a type of secular Italian song that flourished around the turn of the sixteenth century, with clear harmonies and catchy rhythms. Its music alternates long, sustained notes and bursts of quick, chattering syllables, mimicking the cricket's incessant song. The piece has been linked to a certain Carlo Grillo, a singer at the Milanese court who was known for grumbling about his patron's casual approach to paying wages: like Grillo the cricket sings only for the love of it.

El grillo è buon cantore
Che tiene longo verso
Dalle beve, grillo canta
Ma non fa come gli altri uccelli
Come li han cantato un poco
Van de fatto in altro loco
Sempre el grillo sta pur saldo
Quando la maggior el caldo
Alhor canta sol per amore

The cricket is a good singer
Who can hold long notes
After drinking, the cricket sings
But he doesn't do like the other birds
Once they've sung a little bit
They go somewhere else
The cricket instead stands firm
When it's very hot out
He sings only for the love of it

---- Interlude: Café Jazz Set with The GillyBillies ----

(Barbara and Bill McGillivray)

Bistro Fada by Stephen Wrembel
Dark Eyes - Russian Romance by Florian Herman
The Sheik of Araby by Ted Snyder

---- The Sea - Hope and Pleasure ----

Sweet and Low

Joseph Barnby (1838-1896)

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). 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...

I do like to be beside the seaside

John A. Glover-Kind (1880-1918) arr. Andrew Carter

This popular British music hall song was written in 1907 and first recorded as early as 1909 by a popular comedian and singer of the time, Mark Sheridan. It was composed at a point when the annual visits of British workers to the seaside were booming. It was later used as a signature tune by Reginald Dixon MBE, the resident organist at the Tower Ballroom, Blackpool between 1930 and 1970 remembered by many for his numerous recordings and broadcasts. Our performances of this and of *Teddy Bears' Picnic* are dedicated to the arranger Andrew Carter who died earlier this year and was a much-respected composer and conductor in his own right.

---- One Lemming and Two Dying Swans ----

Reading: The Lemmings' Reunion

Les Barker (read by Ann Crisp)

The Silver Swan

Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625)

Orlando Gibbons was one of the most accomplished English composers of his generation and this five-voice madrigal, published in 1612, is perhaps his best-loved piece. It makes use of the ancient legend that swans sing only at the moment of death. The music is spare and restrained, fitting the melancholic import of the text - *more geese than swans now live, more fools than wise* - perhaps lamenting the end of the late Elizabethan madrigal style as much as the general state of society.

Il Bianco e Dolce Cigno

Jacob Arcadelt

From the other end of the madrigal's heyday, this extremely popular piece was the first number in one of the earliest volumes of madrigals, *Il primo libro di madrigali d'Archadelt*, in 1538. It puts the legend of the dying swan to a very different use to Gibbons, as described by conductor, Owain Park. "*Phrases glide and settle like the bird itself upon the water, while moments of harmonic warmth and suspension linger poignantly on words*

of sighing and release. Beneath the surface calm lies a knowing play of double meanings, typical of the madrigal tradition, in which death becomes a metaphor for sexual fulfilment."

*Il bianco e dolce cigno
cantando more, ed io
piangendo giung' al fin del viver mio.
Stran' e diversa sorte,
ch'ei more sconsolato
ed io moro beato.
Morte che nel morire
m'empie di gioia tutto e di desire.
Se nel morir, altro dolor non sento,
di mille mort' il di sarei contento.*

The white and sweet swan
singing dies, and I
weeping, reach the end of my life.
Strange and different fate,
that he dies inconsolable
and I die blessed.
Death, which in dying
fills me full of joy and desire.
If in dying, I [were to] feel no other pain,
a thousand times a day I would be happy to die

---- Mortal Encounters and New Lives ----

Reading: Jim

Hilaire Belloc (read by Andrew Scott)

The Hunting Song

Tom Lehrer (1928-2025) arr. Alex Flood

Over his long life, Tom Lehrer successfully practised music, comedy, lyrics, mathematics and physics - though only occasionally all at the same time... Released in 1953, Tom gave this introduction to *The Hunting Song*. "Almost every day during the hunting season you see at least one item in the newspapers about somebody who has shot somebody else, under the impression that he was a deer with a red hat perhaps, maybe a large flesh-coloured squirrel. At any rate, it seems to me that this marks an encouraging new trend in the field of blood sports, and deserves a new type of hunting song which I present herewith." This arrangement is by our former conductor, Alex Flood, who has also kindly helped us prepare for this concert.

Reading: True Story

Michael Rosen (read by Marianne Michael)

---- A Mythical Menagerie ----

Pink Panther

Henry Mancini (1924-1994) arr. Hans Kaldeway and Alex Flood

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...

Teddy Bears' Picnic

John Bratton (1867-1947) arr. Andrew Carter

This much-loved 'English' song is not quite what it seems. It actually began life as an instrumental piece in 1907, written by the (otherwise long-forgotten) American composer, John Walter Bratton. The words, by Irish songwriter Jimmy Kennedy, were only added 25 years later. The first recording of this version was also in 1932 by Henry Hall and his BBC Orchestra with vocals by Val Rosing. The quality was found to be so good that it was used by BBC audio engineers right up until the early 1960s to aurally assess the frequency response of audio equipment.

The Bare Necessities

Terry Gilkynson (1916-1999), arr. Nicholas Hare

The 1967 Disney animation 'The Jungle Book' has a particularly exuberant score and this song, originally performed by Phil Harris as Baloo the bear with Bruce Reitherman as Mowgli the 'man cub', is one of the highlights.

The Damon Singers

Musical Direction: Keith Armstrong, Simon Beattie, Martin Cunningham

We are also very grateful to Alex Flood for his invaluable help and guidance.

Soprano

Ann Crisp
Sarah How
Claire Hunter
Rachel Meldrum
Marianne Michael
Emma Summers

Alto

Caroline Greenwood
Erika Lukács
Linda Miller
Madeleine Symes
Karen van Oostrum
Uli Wright

Tenor

Simon Beattie
David Freedman
Simon Hunter
Duncan Passey
Chris Turner

Baritone/Bass

Keith Armstrong
Martin Cunningham
Sebastian Gibbs
Andrew Scott

Notes by Martin Cunningham