

**Programme Notes***When the Earth Stands Still . . .***Let all mortal flesh keep silence!** (1906 - 1925)**Edward C. Bairstow** (1874 - 1946)

A sterling English organist and composer, Bairstow furnished the Anglican choral tradition with repertoire which is still regularly performed both liturgically and in concert. Tutored by leading pedagogues at Oxford, Westminster Abbey, and the University of Durham, he soon attained prestigious organist posts from London to York, via Wigan and Leeds, all the while playing the organ, composing, and conducting, with high praise from his colleagues. Most notable amongst his unaccompanied choral anthems is this unique setting of **Let all mortal flesh keep silence!** Atmospheric and symbolic, it was an instant success: its text stirring the composer - during his tenure as music director at Leeds Parish Church - to produce what is regarded to be his masterpiece. It has been sung and recorded by numerous choirs with similar zeal ever since its first publication nearly two decades later.

Drawing on a mixture of traditions and influences, it opens with a plainchant-like intonation, evoking Mediaeval custom. The other voice parts answer this opening call, accumulating in strength, volume, energy, speed, and resolve towards its climax, which is led by the basses marching up and down a variety of related arpeggios, magnificently articulating '*the cherubim with many eyes and winged seraphim who veil their faces*', before bursting forth as a triple en-masse '*alleluia!*'. The ending is as engaging and unexpected as the opening: peacefully completing this masterful musical circle with resplendent stillness.

**Crossing the bar** (1997)**Rani Arbo**, arr. Amidon (fl.)

Tennyson's contemplative text (penned in 1889) provided Rani Arbo (a contemporary American grass-roots folk composer, '*with a particular knack for pairing words and music*') with inspiration - in a similar way to the Liturgy of St James inspiring Bairstow in the opening work of tonight's contemplation of the earth standing still - to craft another immediately engaging musical triumph,

*'leaving audiences everywhere humming and hopeful; spirits renewed'.*

Arranged for unaccompanied four-voice choir by Peter Amidon, this timeless setting (equal in merit and beauty with those by Stanford and Parry, *inter alia*) is '*mellifluous, sophisticated and soulful*'. Arbo wrote it in memory of her husband's grandmother, with whom she sat whilst she died peacefully in her late 90s, and who briefly spoke from her final slumber (overlooking America's ancient Potomac River Valley) to say '*sunset and evening star*' (which led Arbo to discover its origin in Tennyson's poem, written when he was 81). Elegiac and soothing, Amidon's sensitive arrangement creates a musical duvet of calm around the music's sinuous melody, warmly uniting the voices in purpose, spirit, and material.

**Do not be afraid!** (2010 - 2015)

**Philip Stopford** (b. 1977)

Another thoughtful and skilled composer, adept at choosing and enhancing the text he sets to music, Stopford was commissioned to write **Do not be afraid!** by friends for the baptism of their daughter in the Church of St Peter and St Paul in Uplyme, near Lyme Regis. Stopford chose words (based on verses from the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 43) by the living teacher and writer, Gerard Markland (b. 1953), for their apt directness and positive reassurance.

Characteristic of Stopford's musical style, this musical prayer is scored for the traditional four a-cappella (unaccompanied) choral voices (soprano, alto, tenor, and bass), culminating with a brief solo (played tonight on the flute). Headed, '*flowing and with care*', its four verses wend their way: '*tuneful, melodic, memorable and deeply moving*'.

From Westminster Abbey to Christ Church, Bronxville, New York, Stopford has worked and learnt much on his musical odyssey, which also boasts Truro Cathedral; Oxford University; and Canterbury, Chester, and Belfast's St Anne's Cathedrals, producing an impressive portfolio of award-winning, chart-topping choral music from mass settings to carols, '*creating a journey . . . beautifully crafted . . . colourful . . . scintillating . . . evocative*': all epitomised in this gently encouraging musical bestseller, whose calm, comfort and assurance are evoked by textual repetition, richly expressive chords, and lilting rhythms.

**Wie soll ich** (Christmas Oratorio, 1734)

**J. S. Bach** (1685 - 1750)

*Ah! Lord, how shall I meet Thee, how should I welcome Thee a-right?  
All nations long to greet Thee, my hope, my sole delight!  
Brighten the lamp that burneth but dimly in my breast,  
And teach my soul that yearneth to honour such an eminent guest!*

The father of Western Classical music - the ultimate guru composers, performers, students, and audiences have turned to, modelled on, and drawn inspiration from - Johann Sebastian Bach wrote his seasonal paean, **Weihnachtsoratorium** (*Christmas Oratorio*), B. W. V. 248, as a set of six self-contained cantatas (each one for a specific feast day of the Christmas period) as a substantial and brilliant celebratory union of words and music, voices and instruments, solos, ensembles and choruses, for professionals and amateurs: intended for all. This glorious chorale (a Lutheran hymn) is harmonised (with separate alto, tenor and bass parts supporting and enriching the well-known, pre-written, seventeenth-century soprano tune) in exemplary Bachian fashion; with equal interest for everyone (thus musically reflecting the prevailing religious philosophy that everyone is different but equal).

Beloved of Bach (and other fellow composers, including Buxtehude), this chorale tune for Christmas Day (positioned as the first unifying chorale in the first part of his **Christmas Oratorio**) would have been sung not only by the choir Bach had trained, but also by the congregations of both St Thomas's and St Nicholas's Churches in Leipzig during the Christmas of 1734. Designed to encourage, unite, and educate, this chorale is both uplifting and soothing; even its somewhat surprise incomplete ending . . .

*Sonata in C major for flute and piano, H.W.V. 365 (1712)    G. F. Handel (1685 - 1759)*  
*Larghetto - Allegro - Larghetto - A Tempo di Gavotti - Allegro*  
*Tina Guthrie ~ flute*  
*Nigel Guthrie ~ piano*

Handel regularly composed for a flexible variety of instruments according to the availability and proficiency of players. His sonatas (music in several contrasting movements, typically just for two solo performers: one playing a woodwind or string instrument; the other playing a keyboard; often with a cello doubling the keyboard's bass line/left-hand part to reinforce its importance) reveal a wealth of colourful, dance-inspired, lyrical, attractive and witty music, all pertinent to this glorious **C-major sonata**, which was specifically intended for '*flauto*' (then recorder; now, more commonly, the flute) and '*cembalo*' (then harpsichord; now, more commonly, the piano).

This multi-partite **C-major sonata** (whose successive movements typically contrast in character and tempo/speed) is exemplary of Baroque chamber music, with an equal partnership and distribution of musical material between the players: mixing and balancing equality and synchronicity, with a satisfying mixture of leading tune and supportive accompanimental rôles.

Parody was a typical compositional practice of an age when music was often needed rapidly, and copyists and publishers were in short (and expensive) supply. This was an art frequently polished and perfected by Handel, as here: its second movement *Allegro* fugato reappeared in the opening overture to his opera, **Scipione H.W.V. 20**, in 1726; the third movement *Larghetto* appeared earlier as the third movement of his **F-major sonata for Oboe, H.W.V. 363a**; and its fifth and final movement (another sprightly *Allegro*) provided the musical substance for a duet ('*Placa l'alma*': 'Bid thy soul rest in calm and peace') from his opera, **Alessandro, H.W.V. 21**, also compiled over a decade later in 1726. The result in each manifestation is wholly convincing, integrated, and homogeneous, as in this triumphant and elegant exemplar.

**Be still my soul! (Finlandia, op. 26, 1900)**

**Jean Sibelius (1865 - 1957)**

Continuing the theme of calm contemplation and stillness, this freshly-composed hymn also unifies a diverse panoply of sources, combining words (for the three versions specially selected for tonight's concert performance) by three different poets (over four centuries) with pleasurable familiar music by the archetypal Scandinavian, Romantic-epoch musician, Sibelius.

The first oft-sung eponymous verse is the customary English translation (by Jane Borthwick, 1813 - 1897) of a German hymn by prolific hymn-writer, Catharina von Schlegel (1697 - ca. 1768); the second is from '*a patriotic song of peace*' (written between both world wars; and expressing hope for enduring peace between all nations, races, cultures, and religions), by American poet, composer, and illustrator, Lloyd Stone (1912 - 1993); and the third and final verse was written in response to the former verses and the music by the first tenor of Voces8, Blake Morgan (an American-born and -educated singer, composer, and arranger), whose music most aptly '*promotes introspection and thought, bringing us back to the things in life that truly are important*'.

Iconic Finnish-composer, Sibelius (a national musical hero, whose head featured on the Finnish 100-mark note; after whom the Helsinki Music Institute is now known as the Sibelius Music Academy; and whose birthday is celebrated annually as a national day of Finnish music) wrote seven ground-breaking symphonies; a legendary **Violin Concerto**; and thirteen nature-inspired tone poems, including the patriotic depiction of key episodes of Finnish history, entitled **Finnish Press Celebration Music** (in support of the newspaper staff suspended for editorially criticising Finland's Russian rule by Tsar Nicholas II), whose eighth and final section, **Finland Awakens**, has become known as **Finlandia** (a homage to his homeland); from which this exquisite ear-worm originated.

Imbued with the sounds and musical language of his musical idols (Busoni, Bruckner, Liszt, Richard Strauss, and Wagner), it is now recognised the world over as the cherished national song of Finland, serenely symbolising hope and resolution.

### **When the earth stands still (2017)**

**Don Macdonald (b. 1966)**

*'Come listen in the silence of the moment before rain comes down . . .'*

Lending its title to that of tonight's concert, this next piece is a diaphanously ethereal unaccompanied choral setting of words also created by the composer, whose eclectic background embraces performing, educating, composing, and producing music for theatre, dance, and film, fusing classical, folk, jazz, world, and rock genres.

Although an active multi-instrumentalist, Macdonald feels the closest connection to choral music, as exemplified in this remarkable terpsichorean King's-Singers-style cameo: one of numerous commissions by top-flight international choirs.

In his own words: *'I first got the notion to write this poem when I was lying on the grass with my young son next to me, both of us transfixed by the slow-motion celestial dance of billowing clouds above us. In moments like these time has a way of slowing down and the high-stakes patterns of everyday life somehow become more trivial. The song is a call to a loved one to be present in the moment and to really see and reflect on simple things like the rain, the quiet, and the cool breeze. It is in these moments that we can greater appreciate the gift of life and the ability to love and be loved.'*

*'I wrote this for my wife Allison Girvan's small but advanced youth choir, Laline, the smallest of 3 ensembles that she directs. I decided to compose a song much as a contemporary songwriter would, with my own lyrics and a form based around repeating verse and chorus. This is probably one of the easiest pieces of mine to learn yet one of the hardest to perform since the long phrases require a great deal of attention to dynamics, breathing, and consistency of tone'.*

### **Great God of love (1840)**

**Robert L. Pearsall (1795 - 1856)**

An Englishman, born and brought up by a wealthy family in the West-country, Pearsall was a keen and busy amateur composer (counter-balancing his career as a barrister and life with his Bristol-based family). Luxuriating in his own Mediaeval Swiss castle retreat at Wartensee (bought after many years of living in Germany), he soon moved to the shores of Lake Constance, above the monastery of St Gall (the eternal *'healing place of the*

*soul')* for further inspiration and hedonism, and proceeded to revive the art of composing and singing madrigals with consummate flair and universal approval.

Composed in the same year as its companion piece - the similarly voluptuously-textured, **Lay a garland - Great God of love** is styled as a Romantic-epoch madrigal (one of 22 he wrote throughout his life, as nods back to the Renaissance period), woven through many a gradual accumulation of its 8 voice parts (2 sopranos, 2 altos, 2 tenors, and 2 basses) to an ultimately fulfilling colourful climax, prior to a well-graded and welcome release: luxuriously lithe, noble and elegant to the end. It was written for the Bristol Madrigal Society of which Pearsall, a veritable '*Renaissance man*', was a founding member. Dedicated in 1839 to his friend, its then musical director, Davis Corfe, it was premièred with bountiful admiration and appreciation.

Merging both a style and genre of music enjoyed in small, familial groups from the 16th-century Renaissance madrigals (by the likes of Byrd, Gibbons, Morley, Tomkins, Wilbye and Weelkes) with his unique brand of 19th-century Romanticism, it abounds in adventurous harmonies, voluptuous sonorities, captivating chord progressions and sybaritic suspensions (which create luscious musical clashes by suspending notes from one chord into the next before resolving them into the expected notes of the new chord - indeed, in his **Great God of love**, Pearsall astonishingly suspends all 7 notes of its tonal scale at once to outstanding effect; especially in their ravishing and uplifting resolution!), all combining to conjure up a more mellifluous and magical atmosphere than ever achieved before.

*'With words and music from the same mind, Pearsall, the tonal architect  
- and the undisputed master of the Victorian madrigal -  
makes each help the other, and so frame a perfect work of art:  
from the building up of the opening chords to the peaceful close  
- it is a real and eternal masterpiece'*

**Alleluia! (Triumph of Time and Truth, 1757)**

**G. F. Handel (1685 - 1759)**

The show-stopping choral conclusion to Georg Frideric Handel's first ever oratorio (effectively, an opera with a sacred subject), the Roman **Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno (The Triumph of Time and Truth, H.W.V. 46**, featuring its four allegorical characters: beauty, pleasure, truth, and time), this *Alleluia!* is markedly different from his more famous and ubiquitous *Hallelujah!* chorus (different in spelling as well) from his parody oratorio-style **Messiah**. built in a more Bach-ian way, with the four voice parts inter-twining both dependently and independently (in the *Hallelujah!* chorus, the vocal parts mostly coincide, as in a hymn), to create a busier, fuller, more fascinating, ever-varying, and thrilling texture and musical effect (necessary, as both choruses just

comprise one word repeated multiple times). He revised and expanded this oratorio 30 years later, in 1737, still in Italian, before its current English incarnation (with its text translated into English by one Thomas Morell, who also introduced a fifth character for English audiences: deceit). He further revised and expanded it in March 1751 as **H.W.V. 71**, premièring it with tremendous success at Covent Garden Theatre, London. It remained a favourite work '*of unfailing high quality and frequent delight . . . for exalted experience!*' he wished to polish, hone, and thence present to multiple audiences and generations of audiences from Rome to London.

In this fitting peroration (arranged especially for this concert for unaccompanied four-part choir, to focus on the sound, brilliance, and scintillation of voices alone), beauty has invoked her guardian angels to direct her actions in the way of truth, and the chorus (representing us as onlookers to the narrative) praise her wisdom in choosing truth and virtue over sensual decadence and hedonism, with this tintinnabulation of *alleluias!* which rise ever higher in pitch, volume, and musical temperature, before coming to rest resolutely and slowly homophonically (with all four of its voice parts moving together in sync) with a veritably fashionable Baroque-period cadence, clearly and affirmatively signalling the ending, not only of this chorus, but also of the whole substantial oratorio.

## interval

**Sing me a song!** (ca. 1580)

**Orazio Vecchi** (1550 - 1605)

Turning back in time and across to Italy, this half of tonight's concert of the property and power of music to soothe and sustain; calm and comfort; inspire and delight, commences with a jaunty a-cappella canzonetta (a popular Italian song) rejoicing unequivocally that '*music can calm the pain of hearts forsaken . . .*', as '*music is the comrade of joy and medicine for sorrows*'.

In the style of the music of the leading Italian Renaissance Gabrieli family, this bodacious miniature is typical of the output of this avid madrigalian, Vecchi (whose surname literally means '*old*' in English), who perfected this genre in a dramatic and often comic vein, to become the most sought-after entertainment of his day. With hallmarks of clarity and directness, and revealing that he was an expert in his art, this characteristic lighter-mood madrigal is both stylish and characterful - and charming and slightly saucy - with its distinctive Renaissance gait and harmonies.

A voracious composer of copious music, Vecchi travelled extensively throughout Italy and further afield, garnering both stylistic inspiration, commissions, and accolades for his work, notably this canzonetta, which remains replete with catchy couplets, foot-tapping rhythms, and period mood and word painting (reflecting the spirit and meaning of the song and its words via musical gestures), all the way to its final couplet:

*'Sing me to sleep with a sweet serenading,  
gently from sound to silence fading . . . !!'.*

### **Come in and stay awhile! (1977)**

**Rhonda Polay (fl.)**

*Come in and stay a while; cast the world aside for now!  
Give yourself a chance to breathe, and try your best to smile!  
Sometimes it's hard to relax, but you need to take the time!  
Pleasantries can be some help, if you search until you find  
The one who takes your fondest dream and turns it into now.  
So let this place be your lifestyle; come in and stay a while!*

*[Rhonda Polay, 1977]*

Little is known of either the composer or the background to this unaccompanied setting of her own words written 40 years ago; but it is clearly the work of an experienced and thoughtful, accomplished and reflective artist, singer and composer, in both its efficacious and practical design and content.

Born Rhonda Sandberg, Polay is an eclectic - yet reclusive - model, dancer, actress, pianist, organist, singer, composer, coach, adjudicator and clinician, with her own music-publishing company (Rhondalay Music Press) based in Wales.

Starting slowly, softly, with discreet ease, and in unison, this miniature cameo is characterized by a fluid series of suavely jazz-infused chords (which amass and linger before moving on to the next one), on its clearly-phrased and homophonically-presented 27-bar voyage. The middle section ('sometimes it's hard to relax') picks up in both volume and tempo, before calming down to recall the opening ('the one who takes . . .') via 3 paused unison notes.

However, the climax of the piece is just before the final phrase (which also begins in unison: an engaging hallmark of this piece) on the end of the word, '*lifestyle*'. Here it rests, momentarily, on a paused semibreve with a classic jazz harmony which is echoed in the closing chord (now hauntingly softer and lower . . .).

## Abendfeier in Venedig (1848)

## Clara Schumann (1819 - 1896)

*Ave Maria! Sea and sky are at rest, bells ring out from all the towers.*

*Ave Maria! Leave all earthly activity, pray to the Virgin and to the Virgin's Son!*

*The angelic throng now is kneeling with lilies wrapped around their staves,*

*And through the roseate clouds, the songs of blessed spirits float ceremoniously down.*

A paradigm of German Romanticism, '*Evening Celebration in Venice*' is a prayerful rumination also for four-part unaccompanied choir, sandwiched by its twice iterated homophonic refrain, '*Ave Maria*' (Hail Mary!). Renowned as the champion pupil of her eminent paternal pedagogue, Clara Schumann dominated European concert life for well over half a century from being a well-travelled child prodigy to a pre-eminent professional pianist '*of consummate artistry*' (and prodigious memory); an influential and sought-after piano teacher (following in the footsteps of both her parents); and muse to her husband (the quintessential Romantic, Robert Schumann) and to her lifelong friend and confidant, Johannes Brahms.

Little time remained for composing, but extensive unparalleled experience of the greatest music, musicians (with whom she regularly performed), and composers of her time, coupled with her understanding of the *Zeitgeist* (the spirit of the time), resulted in a well-cultivated crop of compositions.

Possessing innate musical instinct and wisdom, her compositions reflect what she most liked, enjoyed, and savoured of contemporary music. Often tender and lyrical, always expressive and passionate, this piece (one of a set of three unaccompanied part songs, which were the only compositions she wrote in 1848) was conceived for her husband's birthday, and rehearsed in secret with the Dresden Choral Society as a surprise birthday gift for him.

The specially-chosen words are by Emmanuel Geibel (1815 - 1884), and awoke Clara's imagination to setting the idea of heavenly stillness on earth to music with delicate poise and wistful sounds, and satisfying, comfortable ranges of pitches for the singers to sing with gentle dynamics (energy and volume levels).

*'Composing gives me great pleasure . . .  
there is nothing that surpasses the joy of creation,  
if only because through it one wins hours of self-forgetfulness,  
when one lives in a world of sound.'*

**Skylark** (1941)

**'Hoagy' Carmichael** (1899 - 1981),  
arr. John Rutter (b. 1945)

A prolific American polymath, Hoagland Howard Carmichael was a leading Tin Pan Alley songwriter in '*the golden age of American song*' in the first half of the twentieth century. He composed several hundred songs, an astonishing number of which became classic hits, such as **Georgia on my Mind**, **Heart and Soul**, and **Stardust**. Often experimental and pioneering, in both his writing and his use of emerging technologies for the creation and dissemination of his work, he paved the way for many future artists, sound engineers, and record producers, collecting awards and praise throughout his life. Recordings and collaborations include numerous gigs with 'Bix' Beiderbecke and Louis Armstrong, and songs with the lyricist, Johnny Mercer, including his beloved **Skylark**, with its '*jazz-infused melody, nostalgic lyrics, wide appeal, and magical harmonic progressions*'.

The inspiration for its melody came from an improvised cornet solo by Beiderbecke; its lyrics from Mercer's long-time yearning for the charismatic Hollywood actress, Judy Garland, with whom he had a turbulent affair. Championed by such top artists as Glenn Miller, Bing Crosby, and Ella Fitzgerald, it rapidly became a much-covered jazz standard - and is even credited with inspiring the naming of the American Buick 'Skylark' car!

In a fascinating shift through time and across the Atlantic Ocean, its arrangement by classical, Cambridge-educated John Rutter fuses yet more elements into a timeless whole. By turns static and mobile; resting and soaring; mellow and euphonious, Rutter's textural concept combines a prominent flute solo and a virtuosic piano part, with both solo and call-and-response writing for the choir '*provides a cushion of evocative harmonies*.' Rutter arranged **Skylark** for specific performers (pianist, Wayne Marshall; flautist, Daniel Pailthorpe; and the Cambridge Singers) to honour the dulcet skylark as a symbol of the spirit.

**Ain't misbehavin'** (1929)

**'Fats' Waller** (1904 - 1943),  
arr. Peter Gritton (fl.)

Thomas Wright 'Fats' Waller was another innovative, productive, multi-talented, American jazz musician, equally popular in the States and Europe, with several of his favourite songs, including **Ain't misbehavin'**, reaching the heights of the Grammy Hall of Fame, and many hundred more (including countless songs he ghost wrote for other

jazz musicians) still enjoyed by jazz musicians (professionals and amateurs), and audiences the world over.

*'A man who made the piano sing . . . the soul of melody . . . a bubbling bundle of joy'*, Waller produced his best, most enduring numbers with his lifelong collaborator, Andy Razaf, with whom he created this swing song, **Ain't misbehavin'**, with its striding bass line (recalling the left-hand piano parts of Scott Joplin's jaunty ragtime numbers), as well as writing extensively for radio, film, and Broadway shows, ultimately resulting in a sea of plaques on the Songwriters and Jazz Halls of Fame - and even a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award.

Originally written for a Broadway musical comedy, **Connie's hot chocolates, Ain't misbehavin'** was first performed in Harlem, soon to be spotted and then directed by legendary jazz trumpeter-vocalist, Louis Armstrong, who particularly loved this song as *'one you could cut loose, play all around it, and swing with!'*.

Numerous artists have played around and swung with it ever since, from Eartha Kitt to Nat 'King' Cole; from Ray Charles to Dave Brubeck; and from its original state, with 'Fats' Waller simultaneously both singing the words and playing the piano, to the cool, slick arrangement made by Peter Gritton that will be performed tonight.

*'An instant showstopper with its beautifully crafted, inventive and catchy melody . . . it is sophisticated yet simple and memorable'*. It has even been deemed to be *'a genuine masterpiece'*, as one of the most recorded songs of all time:

*'the culmination of his compositional brilliance as a master of stride piano, and the launching point of a broad popular fame that endures'*.

*Fantaisie for flute and piano, op. 79 (1898)*      **Gabriel Urbain Fauré (1845 - 1924)**

*Andantino - Allegro*

*Tina Guthrie ~ flute*

*Nigel Guthrie ~ piano*

Laying the foundations of musical Impressionism (akin to the painting style of such artists as Monet, Renoir, Turner, and Sorolla, catching and portraying their impression of a place, person, event, of emotion, in their art; as Debussy, Ravel, Messiaen and Takemitsu carried ineffably into the realm of music), Fauré linked the vocal quality of certain instruments (especially the flute and piano) with this enchanting artistic concept to great and enduring effect; as in this polychromatic, improvisatory **Fantaisie**.

Commissioned by, and dedicated to, the legendary French flautist and Professor of flute, Paul Taffanel, this bi-partite cornerstone of the flute repertoire was originally intended for the Paris Music Conservatoire's annual flute competition, providing the participants with a freshly-penned work which posed numerous technical and musical challenges: *'to test the examinees on matters of phrasing, expression, tone control, and virtuosity.'* The result, tailored in detail by Taffanel to suit both the flute as well as this specific competition, was such a triumph in itself that it has been played in concerts, competitions, and recorded throughout the world ever since.

Its rhythmically-wafting opening section is a scene-setting, exploratory *Andantino* (gently flowing and swaying), which Fauré parodied later in the incidental music to Maeterlinck's symbolist play, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, op. 80 (1898). A well-prepared pause of complete silence and stillness in expectation of what is to follow separates the **Fantaisie's** two sections. And so an *Allegro* emerges: a faster, lengthier, and more vibrant and colourful section cast in a new key (exploring different colours and their effects) and time signature (increasing the energy, pace, and drive of this work) towards its triumphant close: a fitting flourish to this grand finale!

**Long time ago** (1950)

trad., arr. A. Copland & I. Fine  
(1914 - 1962)

Another American innovator and fuser, Copland specialised in the field of classical music, composing, writing, teaching, performing (as pianist and conductor) his own and other American music; preserving and promoting his heritage whilst furnishing it with fresh material, aiming to evoke the American landscape, tradition, and spirit in his music, such as in his settings of **Old American Songs**, from the first set of which (written at the instigation of British composer, Benjamin Britten for his music festival in Aldeburgh, and first performed there with Britten accompanying the tenor, Peter Pears, on the piano) comes this haunting and reflective version of **Long time ago**.

From **The Cat and the Mouse**, **Four Piano Blues** and **Fanfare for the Common Man** to his **Appalachian Spring**, **Rodeo**, and **Clarinet and Piano Concertos**, his music spans genres from ballet to chamber music; from orchestral to vocal; and from opera to film scores. Instructively taught by the much-revered and multi-influential Nadia Boulanger in Paris, and a fan of, and correspondent with, the Japanese Impressionist composer, Toru Takemitsu, Copland's approach to composition was to collect *'fragments of musical ideas as they came to him. When he needed a piece, he would turn to these ideas (his 'gold nuggets') . . . and thence write a piano sketch . . .'* and eventually, assembling these materials (especially in the case of pre-existent tunes, like **Long time ago**), the piece would emerge, *'creating an entire piece that could be thought of as a functioning entity . . .*

*with a strong sense of forward motion . . . the product of the emotions', all manifest clearly in his setting of **Long time ago**, revealing 'the most distinctive and identifiable musical voice of America . . . an individuality . . . that helped define for many what American concert music sounds like . . . a mirror of America'.*

Immersed in the musical worlds and soundscapes of Chopin, Debussy and Verdi, as well as Ravel, Satie, Berg, and Bartok, Copland's nuggets provided infinite possibilities which he worked and re-worked assiduously and meticulously, often applying a musical Occam's razor, as in this lyrical ballad of love, loss, and nostalgia (whose traditional tune and text Copland discovered in the library of America's Rhode-Island Brown University), which Irving Fine (American composer, 1914-1962) arranged beautifully for four-part chorus and piano from its original scoring for solo voice and piano. The music follows the strophic structure of its poem and its soothing rhythms, and is delicately melodically ornamented (as sighs reflecting the sentiment and character of its text).

**Mary, did you know?** (1984 - 1991)

**Mark Lowry** (b. 1958)

Best known for this Christmas song, Lowry is an active American singer, songwriter, minister, and author, with strong religious beliefs and entertainment skills which prompted this piece 40 years ago, writing its words for a nativity play for his church, with questions he would like to ask Mary, Jesus's mother, leaving the listener to mull them over and answer themselves. Seven years later, his friend, the gospel songwriter, Buddy Greene, wrote this beguiling music, and history was made, as it has been performed by singers and groups as diverse as Michael Crawford, Dolly Parton, and the close-harmony group, Pentatonix.

Tonight's arrangement for the most common unaccompanied four-voice grouping, introduces each voice in turn, starting with the altos and ending with the basses. Its linear phrases reflect the upward intonation of questions and the downward direction of answers. Harmonies accumulate, as each voice part sings and holds their note, with a particularly effective central climax on '*the praises of the Lamb*'. In rhetorical fashion, it ends with the opening phrase ('*Mary did you know?*') also sung by ascending altos, but this time simultaneously with the basses descending (as if the question and its answer are as one), with the sopranos and tenors adding their harmony notes with an unresolved chord, which mirrors the unanswered question of its title.

## Multi-Number Medley

George (1898 - 1937) and Ira (1896 - 1983)

Gershwin, arr. Mac Huff and Althouse

In this concert's spirit of connections, fusion, and unity, there now follows a mélange of the Gershwin brothers' most familiar hits, boasting an appetising buffet of earworms, toe-tapping rhythms, and exciting harmonies. Linking five numbers: **Strike up the band!**, **Summertime**, **Let's call the whole thing off!**, **Someone to watch over me**, **'Swonderful**, and **Nice work if you can get it**, this medley highlights the salient elements that have made the Gershwins so successful, and such songs so captivating and compelling.

An American composer and pianist embracing and connecting both classical, jazz, and popular strands, George Gershwin wrote concertos and operas (including **Porgy and Bess** in 1935, from which the perennial **Summertime** comes), as well as many a film and musical score and song (many of which also became jazz standards). Also a composition pupil of Nadia Boulanger in Paris, and also fascinated with the music of Debussy, Ravel, Berg, Stravinsky, and Shostakovich, he settled in Hollywood. Alas, he also died tragically young, though, fortunately, he also left a bountiful legacy of music. Like Copland, the Gershwin brothers had Russian and Lithuanian roots, and started their musical career on New York City's seminal Tin Pan Alley: one that was to have a lasting effect on popular American and global musical culture.

**Strike up the band!** was written for the 1927 musical of the same name, as a satire on war and military music; **Summertime** is a tranquil, rocking lullaby sung by Bess to her baby on the seashore, as her husband, Porgy, is fishing at sea, and comes from George Gershwin's musical drama/opera, based on DuBose Heyward's eponymous novel; **Let's call the whole thing off!** was written for the 1937 film, **Shall we dance?**, performed by the famous pair, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers on roller skates, poking fun at different pronunciations; **Someone to watch over me** is a slow torch song from the 1926 musical, **Oh, Kay!**, originally sung by the English actress, Gertrude Lawrence, peacefully musing with a rag doll in her hands, later beloved and championed by Frank Sinatra; **'Swonderful'** first appeared on Broadway in the 1927 musical, **Funny face**, and was soon sung independently and ubiquitously by Bing Crosby; and **Nice work if you can get it**, originally written for the movie, **A damsel in distress**, began life in the 1930s, and was subsequently oft performed by the likes of Fred Astaire and The Andrews Sisters.

As George Gershwin declared: '*true music must repeat the thoughts and inspirations of the people and the time*'; to which his fraternal companion, Ira, added: '*a song without music is a lot like 'H<sub>2</sub>' without the 'O'!*'.

*ENCORE:*

**Somethin' stupid** (1967)

**Clarence Carson Parks** (1936 - 2005),  
arr. Frank Sinatra, arr. PJA (2024)

Most famously sung by Frank Sinatra and his daughter, Nancy, the hypnotic ballad, **Somethin' stupid**, was originally recorded by its composer, Parks, and his wife, Gaile Foote (as '*Carson and Gaile*'): a recording which the Sinatras loved and wished to follow with their own rendition, which inspired ExeVox and their director to make a four-voice a-cappella arrangement especially to close tonight's concert in celebration of music and its power to uplift and inspire; excite and soothe; and intrigue and still.

Chart-topping in the 1960s and thereafter - more recently by Robbie Williams and Nicole Kidman in 2001 - and has even appeared on multiple television series, including: **The Simpsons, Breaking Bad, and Better Call Saul.**

## EXEVOX CHAMBER CHOIR

### **Sopranos**

Harriet Brown  
Emma Green  
Tina Guthrie  
Lorna MacLeod  
Melanie Shaw  
Ann Williams

### **Altos**

Helen Adam  
Lorraine Adams  
Helen Beard  
Jessica Dalton  
Carolin van Montfoort  
Diana Wackerbarth

### **Tenors**

Simon Bates  
Julian Clutterbuck  
Garon Heslop  
Nicholas Kellagher

### **Basses**

Maurice Dunster  
Nigel Guthrie  
Peter Harflett  
Charlie Lane  
Paul Rosser