

ETERNAL SPRING OF HOPE:**Ubi Caritas I** (2001)

Ola Gjeilo (b. 1978)

*Where charity and love are, God is there. Christ's love has gathered us into one.
Let us rejoice and be pleased in Him. Let us fear, and let us love the living God.
And may we love each other with a sincere heart.*

A popular and eclectic Norwegian composer and pianist, closely associated with the a cappella British choral octet, **Voces8**, Gjeilo studied music and composition in Norway, London's famous Royal College of Music, and at the prestigious Juilliard School in New York. Praise and awards have been showered on him ever since; and his music is, uniquely, disseminated by multiple unassociated publishing houses throughout the world.

Living in Manhattan, he often returns to Norway for inspiration in fusing ideas old and new, traditional Scandinavian and modern harmonies, with a characteristic blend of minimalism, jazz, folk, classical and Impressionistic musical flavours. Often working in collaboration with Eric Whitacre's favourite lyricist, Charles Anthony Silvestri (b. 1965), Gjeilo also frequently collaborates with fellow American composer and pianist, Morten Lauridsen (b. 1943), who also specialises in unaccompanied choral music.

Dedicated to Lone Larsen and his choral group, **Voces Nordicae** (an outstanding élite Swedish vocal ensemble, founded by Larsen in 1999), **Ubi Caritas I** is the first of a pair of unaccompanied settings of the eponymous sacred text. Clearly evocative of Mediaeval plainchant from its lone opening phrase, this first setting was triumphantly recorded by **Voces8** in 2015.

As Gjeilo wrote: '*It has been one of my most performed and popular pieces . . . and one I loved composing . . . As with Maurice Duruflé's beautiful **Ubi Caritas** (the perfect a cappella piece . . . always a favourite of mine) from 1960, this setting also draws inspiration from the Gregorian chant tradition.*'

Cast in clearly punctuated and separated phrases - always following the natural rhythm, shape and stress of the ancient Latin text it sets - it journeys mostly syllabically (one note per syllable) and homo-rhythmically (all vocal parts mostly moving simultaneously), to create an almost overwhelming effect of calming clarity and soothing simplicity all the way to its impressive concluding '*amen*'.

*'It is a beautiful, erudite, lyrical piece,
with very attractive harmonic colours.'*

Sumer is Icumen In (ca. 1260)

May-Day traditional

Sumer is Icumen In is the first extant piece of written music in England, whose manuscript, known as the '*Reading Rota*', now rests in the British Library. It was written nearly 800 years ago - probably by a well-educated and adventurous monk at Reading Abbey, although no signature was appended - to celebrate, with its optimistic gait, the arrival of summer with its fresh hope and growth.

As with the opening piece of tonight's celebration of the enduring power of music throughout numerous centuries, it is also cleverly constructed; but here as a double canon (or 'rota'), with its ear-worm tune able to be sung as a canon/round with up to four separate staggered entries. The quartet of parts all euphoniously combine to fit neatly and satisfactorily over an ostinato/oft-repeated bass-line, which, itself, can be sung as a canon with two staggered entries, resulting in a remarkable example of six equally-important musical lines entwining in what is known in music as 'polyphony'.

Its Middle English text, in Wessex dialect, is overtly realistic in its depiction of nature, and uses some words onomatopoetically to vivid effect. Its power is clear in the memorability of its melody and its enduring nature; still sung, for example, to herald each May Day at 6a.m. from the top of Magdalen Tower in Oxford. This jubilant music also featured in the 1970s television series, **Bagpuss** (sung in each episode by animated wooden mice as their 'Mouse Organ' song); and appearing in such films as the 1938 **Adventures of Robin Hood**.

Hymnus Eucharisticus (1673)

Benjamin Rogers (1614-1698)

*We worship you, O God the Father, we offer you our praise,
for you nourish our bodies, and minds with heavenly grace.*

*We adore you, O Jesus; you, the only begotten Son,
you who did not disdain to submit to birth in the Virgin's womb.*

Driven onto the cross, you were made the victim of God's wrath.

Through you, our only Saviour, hope of life returned to us.

To you, Eternal Spirit. by whose breath was born by Mary, be our eternal blessings!

Another age-old musical nugget, this delicious four-voice hymn (originally intended for religious communion services), is also part of the Magdalen choristers' unaccompanied May Day recital (another age-old tradition), as well as regularly being used as a sung grace for its college dinners.

Rogers (born and soon active in Windsor as a chorister and subsequently lay clerk at St George's Chapel, before taking up the post of organist Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin, and studying music at Cambridge, before returning as organist of St George's and Eton College, before rising to become music director of Magdalen College, Oxford, where he also obtained his doctorate) was a prominent English composer and organist, whose music was known throughout Europe.

His compositional output (both sacred and secular; choral and instrumental), as well as universal respect for it, was considerable, as this brief paradigm (cast for the four traditional choral voices - soprano, alto, tenor and bass - in the haunting key of A minor) exemplifies.

The Latin text was originally written by the dean of Eton, Dr Nathaniel Ingelo, for a flamboyant feast hosted by then Stuart King Charles II at London's Guildhall in 1660. As with the previous piece, **Hymnus Eucharisticus** has been sung on television and at cinemas in such films as Richard's Attenborough's 1993 depiction of C.S. Lewis in Oxford, **Shadowlands**.

O Yes, Lord God!

Garon Heslop (fl.)

Written by a current ExeVox tenor, this triumphant paean is similarly celebratory. Scored for largely unison (all singing the same note at the same time for maximum clarity and potency) voices led and supported, preluded and concluded, by a stirring piano part, it revels in jazz-infused harmonies and jaunty cross-rhythms.

Built with a succession of arch-shaped two-bar question-and-answer phrases, its musical voyage is both colourful and captivating, as it glides towards its conclusion, setting the words '*thank God!*' in a powerful hymn-like manner, before the piano rapidly jazzily traverses the full breadth of the keyboard from its lowest to its highest C.

Rondo in D major, K. anh. 184/373 (1781) W. A. Mozart (1756-1791)

Allegretto grazioso ~ for flute and piano

Originally written for violin and orchestra, this exquisite, '*perfectly wrought and delightful*' musical jewel will be played by ExeVox soprano, Tina Guthrie, in a sublime arrangement for flute and piano, which skilfully preserves the original's hallmark colour, sparkle, wit and vivacity.

A typically Classical-epoch instrumental showpiece (akin to a concerto finale), it was commissioned by one of Mozart's favourite violinist, Antonio Brunetti, with characteristic elegance and comforting, smile-inducing charm, for a musical evening hosted by Archbishop Colloredo of Salzburg on their visit to Vienna, proudly promoting the musicians of his court and their skills and creativity at Colloredo's father's princely palace.

Mozart famously resigned from the Archbishop's restrictive employment the following month, in favour of living and working in the more appreciative and culturally-attractive epicentre of the Austrian capital.

MUSIC'S ALL-PERVASIVE POWER:

How Do You Keep The Music Playing? (1982)

Michel Legrand (1932-2019),
arr. Alexander l'Estrange (b. 1974)

One of a wealth of musical discoveries made online during the Covid lockdowns, this superb arrangement of a supremely apposite song (in both its lyrics and memorable melody) was written by legendary industrious French composer and jazz pianist, multi-award-garnering Michel Legrand (best known for his Oscar-winning song, **The Windmills of your Mind**), '*a consummate composer.*'

Imbued in the world of film and television, his copious outpourings were much influenced by that heady world and its fashionable demands, as well as just jazz legends as Miles Davis; choral groups including the **Swingle Singers** (with whom his sister sang); and pop bands, such as **Beach House** (counting his niece as a member). And, indeed, **How Do You Keep The Music Playing?** - '*endlessly inventive and deeply passionate*' - was composed - with lyrics by American songwriting duo, Alan and Marilyn Bergman - for the 1982 rom-com film, **Best Friends**, based on a real-life story.

Tonight's arrangement of this now classic song - as performed so compellingly by mezzo-soprano, Helen Charlston, with fellow students at Trinity College, Cambridge (and two years later online in a vast virtual online montage with the Choir of the Earth) - was lovingly crafted by English choral composer, arranger, and animateur, Alexander l'Estrange in 2015, allocating the melody and words to an alto soloist (sung by tutti/all altos in tonight's ExeVox concert), and distributing the accompaniment slickly between the remaining choral voices (eschewing any instrumental backing) to wholly appealing effect, resulting:

'an exuberant mood . . . of intimacy, warmth and sensitivity.'

I Will Lift Mine Eyes (2010)

Jake Runestad (b. 1986)

Minneapolis-based American Jake Runestad is another imaginative award-and honour-winning composer and conductor, '*who believes passionately in the power of music to initiate positive change*', whose works, including this unaccompanied choral gem, have also been praised as '*stirring and uplifting . . . original and expressive . . . connecting the head and the heart*', and nominated for additional global awards.

Versatile and productive, his musical language is characteristically visceral and charismatic, aiming to '*explore authentic human emotions and experiences*', as typified in **I Will Lift Mine Eyes**, '*marrying powerful music to powerful texts.*' and already reveals deep knowledge and insights into musical styles, idioms, and expressiveness, often working with, and for, such groups as **Voces8**, to ensure hewing practical music, savoured and relished equally by performers and audiences.

Runestad found in the text (from Psalm 121) of this unaccompanied four-part motet: '*great beauty in the admiration for natural creation, linked with a promise of guidance and support from a higher power . . . with peace in the splendour of nature*'. He duly sought to capture

'that serenity with carefully shaped melodic lines mimicking mountainous landscapes, and the tone colours and bold hues of where the hills meet the sky.'

And So It Goes (1983-1992)

Billy Joel, arr. Bob Chilcott

Written by the legendary multi-Grammy-award-winning songwriter Billy Joel (born William Martin Joel, a pianist, boxer, and 2013 recipient of the Kennedy Center Honors: the highest award in America for influencing American culture through the arts), '**And So It Goes**' became an instant hit, and now remains a classic standard, originally inspired by folk ballads. It was written about Joel's doomed relationship with the Australian model, Elle Macpherson - and shortly after a serious motorcycle accident badly injured both Joel's hands. It is thus laden with love and regret, yet tinged with sanguine memories. In construction and sound, it resembles a prayer in the form of a hymn (in clear, discrete strands of music - mirroring its text - and

homophonic in texture - with all the vocal parts in rhythmic sync). The version performed tonight was arranged by the prolific English choral composer and arranger, Plymouth-born, Bob Chilcott, for the group with whom he helped to make it even more famous, resonant, and enduring, **The King's Singers**.

With gently swung rhythms (flowing from to its jazz heart); phrases which rise alluringly before falling reluctantly in pitch; and a heartfelt baritone (high bass) solo, this touching arrangement exquisitely captures the spirit of its composer's own words and the pure essence of his music: a timeless bewitching reflection of unrequited love; '*one of his most moving and authentic songs of startling maturity . . . a coda of exquisite grace . . . mournful and bracing . . . a most beautiful ballad . . . so raw in emotion, you can almost hear Joel's heart cry.*'

And So It Goes has also aptly materialised in many a television and film score, including the recent outstanding American series, **This Is Us**, which explores and presents familial relationships with Proustian wisdom, sensitivity and sensibility.

I Got Rhythm (1930)

George Gershwin (1898-1937)

To round off ExeVox's consideration of music's all-pervasive power, this half of their programme closes with one of the most upbeat dance numbers by one of the most famous and familiar of jazz musicians: creator of the style of pure jazz, still much-loved and admired, championed and practised today, George Gershwin.

Primarily an avant-garde American pianist, sadly short-lived Gershwin began as a classically-trained pianist, before energetically experimenting with composition and laying the seeds and watching them burgeon in the field of jazz: from his orchestral **Rhapsody in Blue** and **An American in Paris**, to his musical-opera **Porgy and Bess**, via umpteen songs for shows, hit musicals for Broadway theatres, and scores for Hollywood movies, all at the very heart of American, and thus Western, civilised life. Many works such as '**I Got Rhythm**' have become what is known as jazz standards: models for

subsequent artists and bands to perform with their own added jazz twists and interpretations, breaks and riffs.

With lyrics by his brother, Ira (1896-1983) - his closest and most regular text collaborator - '**I Got Rhythm**' typically (for the Gershwin brothers' songs), although unusually, started life with just the music (for most songs start with their words), to which Ira then created and added his own lyrics. Composed in 1930, it set a new trend in the experimental jazz era, rapidly becoming a cornerstone of the '*bebop*' style (boasting fast, virtuosic writing; addictively obsessive and often eccentric foot-tapping rhythms; oft-repeated melodic fragments - almost like pop tunes - and typically intricate and improvisatory in character - all centred around a complex harmonic structure). It also lay the foundations for what is known as '*rhythm changes*': a particular progression of chords (consisting of four 8-bar phrases - each comprising 1 or 2 chords - in the overall format: A-A-B-A) that was also utilised in subsequent jazz music by such composers as Charlie Parker (of '*Birdland*' fame) and Dizzy Gillespie.

'**I Got Rhythm**' originated in the successful 1930 Broadway musical, **Girl Crazy** (also noted for its song, '**Embraceable You**'), cunningly combining simplicity (for example, in its repetition of short melodic motifs) and complexity (especially as in its harmonies). Gershwin liked his song so much that he later used as the theme for his 1934 orchestral piece for piano and orchestra, **Variations on 'I Got Rhythm'** - it also appeared in the 1951 film, **An American in Paris**, for a song-and-dance routine by Gene Kelly. It remains '*symbolic of the Gershwins; of youthful vitality and optimism; of sparkling virtuosity; of jazz swing; and of the dizzying 1920s, abounding in carefree cheerfulness*', sung, copied, embellished and performed by countless jazz musicians around the world ever since.

*'... I got starlight, I got sweet dreams,
I got my man, who could ask for anything more ?'*
and so, indeed, who could ask for anything more?!

~ *interval* ~

TRANQUIL SLEEP:

A Prayer of King Henry VI (1969) Henry G. Ley (1887-1962)

O Lord Jesus Christ, who hast created, redeemed, and fore-ordained me unto that which now I am, thou knowest what thou wouldest do with me; do with me according to thy will, in thy mercy!

Amen.

Opening the second half of tonight's concert exploring the power of music throughout time and the world is the Founder's Prayer (dating from 1440) at Eton College set to music by Chagford-born organist and professor of music, Henry George Ley, MA, DMus, FRCO, FRCM, Hon RAM. A child prodigy and chorister to the royal family, Ley won many music scholarships, awards and accolades from Uppingham School to the Royal College of Music in London, via Keble College, Oxford. He continued this illustrious musical journey as organist at Christ Church, Oxford, Professor at the College, and musical precentor at Radley and Eton Colleges; at each establishment, teaching, playing and composing for the pupils, before returning to Devon to die in Feniton.

King Henry VI (1421-1471) was twice King of England (1422-1461 and then 1470-1471), famously succeeding to the throne on the death of his father, King Henry V (as his only child) at the tender age of 9 months, inheriting, amongst other burdens, the long-running Hundred Years' War with France. He was taken prisoner by Richard of York in the Wars of the Roses; suffered repeated breakdowns; and was saved only to be captured once more before being imprisoned in the Tower of London; rescued by the Earl of Warwick, restored to the throne; and imprisoned once more only to die in the Tower.

On the plus side, despite his mental infirmity, domineering wife, and generally weak leadership, his interest in education and enlightenment led to his founding and endowing some of the most important and still internationally-leading institutions, including All Souls College, Oxford (now remaining one of the wealthiest of Oxbridge colleges, and uniquely only stocked with the most intellectual fellows, eschewing the need for any undergraduates); King's College, Cambridge; and Eton College, for whom this Latin prayer was dedicated in return. A sumptuous hymnal cameo, its journey is one of hope; shifting from a lonely minor tonality to an assured

major-key resolution. Rhetorical and modal, Ley's timeless music follows the rhythm and sentiment of its Latin text in its musical rhythms and thoughtful harmonies; the reflective silences between its flexible musical limbs/sentences; and its ardent palette of dynamics (energies, moods and volumes). It ends, as it began, in a peacefully devotional and somnolent state.

Lully, Lulla, Lullay (2011)

Philip Stopford (b. 1977)

Continuing the theme of tranquility and sleep, this set turns to another modern setting of much older text, complementing words most often associated with Christmas (from a Mediaeval pageant of the shearers and tailors first documented in 1392, and now known as the '**Coventry Carol**') with similarly soothing and sleepful rocking and warmly-enveloping harmonies (combinations of different notes sung by more than one vocal part).

Stopford is an English organist and composer who specialises in a cappella (without accompaniment) sacred choral compositions, drawing on his experiences as a chorister at Westminster Abbey and Bedford School; organ scholar at Keble College, Oxford, where he studied music; organ scholar for Andrew Nethsingha at Truro Cathedral, and later at Canterbury Cathedral; assistant organist at Chester Cathedral; and director of music at St Anne's Cathedral in Belfast. Thoroughly imbued in ecclesiastical choral traditions, his writing is ever practical and sensitive to its performers and purpose. His rapidly-growing musical corpus embodies the fusion of styles old and new in ways that are at once freshly creative and comfortingly familiar, as the simple beauty of this poignant lullaby reveals, continuing in the footsteps of his compositional ancestors, Herbert Howells and Vaughan Williams.

As the composer explained: '*the words associated with Coventry are haunting, depicting Herod and the slaying of children. However, the lullaby quality of the text is predominant in the music, matched by a glorious soprano descant during the last chorus . . . This carol popped into my head with very little effort; I simply went home from lunch and wrote it out.*'

Modest and subtle; uncomplicated and direct, the plangent spirit and lyricism of this bewitching example of his writing is attractive, atmospheric, and wholly effective. Cast for the traditional four choral voices, a fifth part arises ethereally at its peroration, as a radiant descant for first sopranos, reiterating its reassuring refrain:

'by by lully, by by lulla, by by lullay...'

Rest (1902)

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

Complementing Stopford's novel old-style carol anthem is a rarely-performed interpretation of ruminative words and linguistic pictures and symbols penned by the pre-Raphaelite poet, Christina Rossetti, by Stopford's musical progenitor, Vaughan Williams. Enriching multiple genres and mediums, Vaughan Williams was a tireless contributor as much to the worlds of opera, ballet and chamber music, as to those of orchestras and choirs, both religious and profane in substance and intent.

His music, as his successor, Stopford's, frequently skilfully enmeshed ideas old and new, influenced by England's abundant repertory of traditional folksongs, hymns (both of which he collected, transcribed, arranged, printed, and disseminated), from the Tudor- and Stuart-ages of Renaissance polyphony (complex musical tapestries by such composers as Tallis, Byrd and Gibbons), through the Baroque exuberance of Purcell's elaborate music, to wide-ranging contemporary experimentation; mixed with European influences from his teachers, including Ravel (complementing the influential teaching of the archetypal Englishmen, Parry and Stanford: Vaughan Williams's much-respected pedagogues at the Royal College of Music in London); his studies of music and history at Trinity College, Cambridge; the mutual reactions and discourses regularly enjoyed with his close friends and colleagues, Gustav Holst and Gerald Finzi; and his travels and concert-going lessons, especially throughout Europe's musical most extensive treasure chest of Germany.

His favourite wife and muse, Ursula, recounted her husband's indefatigable passion of art, literature, and poetry from Chaucer and Shakespeare to Whitman and the Rossettis, as primary inspirations for his vocal and choral

music, coupled with his belief that the human voice '*can be made the medium of the best and deepest human emotion.*'

Primarily calm and gentle, as its title indicates, **Rest** melds five separate vocal parts (with two distinct soprano lines atop the customary single alto, single tenor and single bass lines) for an especially mellifluous sonority. Its freshly-conceived melodies delicately mirror and enhance its dreamy text; its supple nuances regularly sigh; its periodic silences provide reflection and repose; its comforting harmonies are consistently velutinous to the ear; and its five-voice texture almost duvet-like in its warm aural embrace: the power of music again proving to be so strong, true and sure.

Goodnight, Dear Heart (2009)

Dan Forrest (b. 1978)

*Warm summer sun shine kindly here; warm southern wind blow softly here,
Green sod above lie light, lie light – good night, dear heart, good night, good night!*

With '*an undoubted gift for writing beautiful music . . . that is truly magical, magnificent, and very cleverly constructed . . . superb sound sculptures . . . full of spine-tingling moments*', Forrest's writing and appreciation are far-reaching, accessible, and increasingly well-established and widely-performed by both amateurs and professionals, instrumentalists and singers, all around the world.

With walls boasting awards and prizes, including a doctorate in composition from the University of Kansas and a master's in piano performance; commissions accruing from the top musical groups from London to Tokyo, and Singapore to New York; performances and discussions on radio and television; and a diary brimming with lessons, lectures, workshops, adjudications, and residencies, American composer, pianist and educator, Dan Forrest, is astonishingly active and fertile in both his musical imagination and output - as well as in his beloved family home and garden!

Goodnight, Dear Heart has swiftly become his most-sung choral work, and with good reason. A choral response to the death of an infant girl in Ethiopia, called Etsegenet, who was about to be adopted by the composer's brother and sister-in-law, it is utterly heartfelt, sincere, and consoling.

Concentrated and compact, this a-cappella elegy - '*both euphoric and tragic*' - is a focussed outpouring of grief and hope expressed and shared - through the power of vocal music - from his heart to ours. Forrest's quest for suitable text led him to the American author, Mark Twain, and, specifically, the poem he had inscribed on the tombstone (in a cemetery in Forrest's home town of Elmira) of his daughter, Susy, for her unexpected death at the age of 24. Both personal and universal, it encapsulates what they were feeling, and provided Forrest with the impetus for this soulful chorale, which he completed within a day. Each voice contributes inextricably melodically and texturally to the whole; its personal effect of united thoughts, reflections, and feelings is consequently both movingly potent and resonant.

*'Subtle, idiomatic, efficient and impactful . . .
this gorgeous, heart-wrenching work features lush harmonies,
memorable and lyrical melodies, and a great amount of sensitivity and finesse.'*

***Chanson de Nuit*, op.15, no. 1 (1889)**

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

As with the Mozart **Rondo** in the first half of this programme, Elgar wrote his **Chanson de Nuit** (which he originally entitled, '*Evensong*', before his publishers, Novello, advised that a French title would be more appealing and sellable, and thus profitable), along with its companion **Chanson de Matin** ('*Morning Song*') for violin in close conversational dialogue and union with his own piano part (which he later rescored for full orchestra), at the same time as his even more famous orchestral **Enigma Variations** (stylistic and musical ideas and parallels abound between both works).

The lyrical nocturnal mini-masterpiece, **Chanson de Nuit** was dedicated to his friend, Frank Ehrke, a medical doctor, who was a violinist in Elgar's local Worcester Philharmonic Orchestra.

Smooth and tuneful, serpentine and limpid, **Chanson de Nuit**
*'contains a depth of sincerity and emotion
not commonly found in pot boilers then or since.'*

NOCTURNAL NATURE:

My Spirit Sang All Day, op. 17/3 (1937) Gerald Finzi (1901-1956)

To open the final set of music, fundamentally focussing on the ready ability and power of music both to auralise nature, and ruminate on it and its sleep-inducing effects at night, is a brisk brief unaccompanied miniature for the conventional four discrete voice parts, replete with ebullient energy and fervid enthusiasm (as he also exhibited for growing rare apples galore!).

Another Edwardian composer; pupil of Stanford; avid reader and fan of the poems of Christina Rossetti; and close working and advice-swapping friend of Vaughan Williams, London-born Gerald Raphael Finzi primarily epitomised things English in the origin, intent, style and content of his sagaciously-crafted and perspicaciously-honed music, as manifested in this piece, the third of a group of seven choral songs scrupulously responding to, and elevating through his craft, the vivid poetry of British poet laureate (and medical doctor), Robert Bridges (1844-1930).

Wrought with agonising pain throughout his short life, from both the loss of close family and friends, and the plague of ill health (dying from Hodgkin's lymphoma), Finzi became an introspective recluse, channelling his efforts and time into music, seeking a permanent public outlet for his private feelings, and fully aware of music's infinite capacity to help, sustain, and nourish.

'Sensitive, attractive and lastingly popular', **My Spirit Sang All Day** is, most unusually for Finzi, ecstatic and declamatory from beginning to end (perhaps because it was created at a time of rare happiness for the composer: meeting and marrying artist, Joyce / 'Joy' Black; and being unanimously appointed to teach at London's leading Royal Academy of Music). With a vibrant tumble of musical phrases, expeditiously delivered and commented on (especially the word 'joy', with its additional personal meaning for Finzi, as the name of his beloved future wife), it explodes with vim, vigour and visceral vivacity.

A spontaneous work, it is wonderfully natural:

*'with pitch and rhythm seemingly unobtrusive to the poetic meaning,
while at the same time giving the meaning of the text
a unique Finzian musical flavour . . .'*

There is perhaps a more intimate marriage of these here to the pitch and rhythm of the music than in the work of any other British composer.'

Svyetye Tikhi ('Gentle light', 1914)

V. S. Kalinnikov (1870-1927)

*O radiant, gentle light of the holy glory of the immortal Father,
the heavenly, the holy, the blessed, O Jesus Christ,
Having come to the setting of the sun, having seen the light of the evening,
we hymn the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: in one God.
Worthy it is at all times to be hymned with reverent voices,
O son of God, giver of life, wherefore the world doth glorify thee.*

This is another finely-hewn, exceptionally evocative and pulchritudinous sacred choral diamond, which sets old Church Slavonic text with a rarified and gripping joie de vivre and sonic coruscance.

Conceived and crafted by a Moscow-trained and -based composer, conductor and teacher (who also wrote an **All-Night Vigil** in music, in the shadow of that of the titanic pianist-composer, Rachmaninov), Viktor Kalinnikov was the younger brother of the more familiar symphonic composer, Vassily (who was championed and eagerly lauded by no less than Rachmaninov himself).

An eminent choral conductor, accomplished composer, and revered pedagogue (most notably at the Moscow Conservatory of Music) - also equally skilled in writing for orchestras and choirs, and marrying influences both past and present - Kalinnikov (as a Russian counterpart to Finzi) aimed to promote all things Russian in music, from folksong to the musical legacy of Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov, in particular, and his output was even championed by Rachmaninov.

Epitomising the finest of unaccompanied Russian Romantic music, **Svyetye Tikhi** is lush in texture, expressive in melody, bold in stature, and fluid in movement; engaging, captivating and stirring from its first chord to its last.

*'These is a note of Tchaikovskian pathos in Svyetye Tikhi,
as its vocal lines blossom with an apt, forward-moving sincerity.'*

Yellow Bird (1957)

*Norman Luboff (1917-1987),
arr. Marcel G. Frank*

This work boasts an addictive tune, whose familiarity is inevitable and confidently planted. Folk-like in its direct lucidity and repetitive melodic hooks: trademarks of Luboff's musical style. An American arranger, publisher and choral director, Chicago-based Luboff worked, by invitation and special request, with many a world-famous artist from Frank Sinatra to Doris Day. His eponymous choir led the American choral scene for the latter half of the twentieth century, and it was for them that he wrote and arranged this cheerfully iridescent number.

Performed by an intimate quartet of voices (just one per part), accompanied by flute and piano, tonight's version of this song highlights both its infectiously shimmying calypso rhythms and the character of its title, with multitudinous birdcalls on the flute.

This French-Caribbean song (originally entitled **Choucoune**) was initially composed (as a '*méringue lente*': Haiti's symbolic national dance) in the nineteenth century by Michel Monton to lyrics (praising the beauty of a Haitian nicknamed '*Choucoune*') by Oswald Durand, and rewritten in English the following century, when American interest in calypsos burgeoned.

From concert hall to recording studio; from Jamaica to Japan; and from schools to television, **Yellow Bird** has captured the hearts, minds and voices of countless people, becoming a now-classic hit (and persistent ear-worm!).

*'Luboff never lost his empathy for the musical layman.
Two generations of choral directors have been profoundly influenced by his work.
Millions of people continue to be magically touched by his wonderful legacy.'*

Josu Elberdin Badiola was born in Spain, where he obtained a degree as a piano and vocal teacher, remaining in his hometown of Pasaia giving lessons and masterclasses there as well as participating in workshops, courses and competitions abroad. He is also world-renowned for his compositions (primarily for youth choirs, publicised and published online via his own website), as recognised by global sales, performances, recordings, awards and commissions.

In a recent interview, Elberdin (as he prefers to be known), explained: '*music emerged in me as a spontaneous phenomenon . . . searching for assorted sounds . . . listening to radio and television and singing the songs I heard . . . and then joining a choir allowed me to discover a wonderful world that I have not left ever since.*'

With regard to his view on music and composing for choirs, he continued: '*the first requirement to start writing is to have a good text . . . to "tell" something through melody and harmony . . . to transmit the feelings that the text suggests to me, and let the music be as descriptive as possible. In addition, often I try for the different voices to have melodic lines as interesting as possible, to allow for the music to be more singable by all the parts of the choir. I believe the secret in writing good choral music lies in attempting a three-fold view of the score: one view as a singer, noting what can be sung better technically and what is harder; one view as a director, allowing you to perceive in what places is the choir likely to encounter issues to learn and tune, or in what places you need to treat the choir in a precise manner; and finally the view of the composer, where you try to translate the ideas in your head in a piece of paper, so that later, thanks to the choir, they can reach the audience in a concert hall. If you have a global vision, you will have more information to hit the target with an optimal result . . . to express many things with few elements.*'

Recounting the story of a shining star surrounded by eight angels, one of whom is lovesick for the star, **The Beautiful Star** is a hypnotic Basque-based musical evocation, strikingly brought to life through the composer's beguiling use of melody and harmony. With persuasive reaffirmations of gradually-building melodic units over stabilising chordal anchors, it ably portrays and fulfils his musical aims, visions and beliefs.

Lullaby of Birdland (1952)

George Shearing (1919-2011),
arr. A. l'Estrange

In another slick and stylish arrangement by Alexander l'Estrange, tonight's survey of the indubitable, inscrutable, ineffable, and indelible power and capability of music to express, aid, encourage, nurture, and heal anyone and everyone in infinite ways, concludes with Shearing's perennial **Lullaby of Birdland**.

A British jazz pianist and legend, and composer of over 300 hit numbers, including this **Lullaby of Birdland**, Shearing was born blind in Battersea. Playing by ear and improvising on the musical hits of the day, he made a living on the piano and accordion, before being talent-spotted by Stéphane Grappelli, before ultimately emigrating to, and becoming a naturalised citizen of, the home of jazz: the United States of America.

Shearing's original music has also reached all four corners of the globe, amassing recognition and awards as he worked throughout the latter half of the twentieth century.

Musically enhancing words by George David Weiss (1921-2010) - under the pseudonym 'B. Y. Forster', to avoid anti-collaboration rules between different music unions - a sought-after American songwriter, **Lullaby of Birdland** was written in 1952 for Charlie 'Bird' Parker (a virtuosic jazz saxophonist, whose playing was often considered to sound birdlike) and the New-York Birdland Jazz Nightclub (favoured venue for countless leading jazz musicians), which was named after him in 1949.

The resultant oscine jazz standard has become the mainstay of many a jazz player, classical musician, and band's regular repertoire: from Ella Fitzgerald to Amy Winehouse; and Friedrich Gulda (a renowned Austrian classical/jazz pianist) to the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Swinging along in two-time, its vivid rhythms, melodic leaps, and powerful inflections all provide yet more musical ear-worms, substantiating the eternal importance and might of music.

ENCORE:

Wiegenlied, op.49/4 (1868)

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897),
arr. R. Gritton

*Good evening, good night, canopied with roses,
Bedecked with carnations, slip beneath the coverlet;
Tomorrow morning, if God wills, you shall be woken again!*

*Good evening, good night, watched over by angels!
In your dreams they'll show you the Christmas Tree;
Sleep sweetly now and blissfully, behold Paradise in your dreams!*

This beautiful lullaby, ubiquitous and successful the world over, was originally the fourth of five German Romantic songs for solo voice and piano.

Brahms's sublime **Wiegenlied** is now ineffably familiar: from cots' mobiles to mobiles' ringtone; throughout schools and on a plethora of films; and in countless arrangements from solo piano to this one for a-cappella choir.

This peaceful, yet powerful cradle song was dedicated to Brahms's former girlfriend, Bertha Faber, for the birth of her second son, and was first performed with Brahms's current flame, Clara Schumann, playing the piano part, which represents the eternally reassuring rocking of the cradle.