

Polymnia

Deep Peace: moments of choral bliss to soothe your soul

Gibbons	Drop, drop slow tears
Tallis	Te lucis ante terminum
Parry	Crossing the bar
Goodall	The Lord is my shepherd
Ravel	Trois beaux oiseaux
Stravinsky	Ave Maria
Whitacre	Water night
Whitacre	The seal lullaby
Gjeilo	Ubi caritas
Britten	The evening primrose
Richard Rodney Bennett	A good-night
Lauridsen	Sure on this shining night
Rutter	Gaelic blessing

Perfect Joy: moments of choral ecstasy to stir your heart

Finzi	My spirit sang all day
Tallis	O nata lux
Viadana	Exsultate justi
Holst	I love my love
Walton	Set me as a seal
Parry	My soul there is a country
Billy Joel arr. Chilcott	And so it goes
Paulus	The road home
Stroope	Amor de mi alma
Ešenvalds	Only in sleep

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Whitacre	Water night
Gjeilo	The rose
Gjeilo	Northern lights
Gjeilo	Ubi caritas
Lauridsen	Nocturnes
	Sa nuit d'été
	Soneto de la noche
	Sure on this shining night

Deep Peace: moments of choral bliss to soothe your soul

Today's concert given by Polymnia is a testament to music's power to soothe, heal and calm - indispensable in our hectic environment! The pieces in this concert are drawn from Britain, Europe and America, and include Renaissance masters, modern classics and works by some of the most widely performed composers writing today.

Orlando Gibbons and **Thomas Tallis** were among the most respected English musicians of the Tudor period, their pieces offering comfort in sorrow and a plea for safety at night. **Hubert Parry**, composer of the hymn-tune *Jerusalem*, sets a poem by **Tennyson**, expressing a hope for peace in the afterlife, in *Crossing the bar*. **Howard Goodall** is well-known for his TV work as well as his choral music, and his setting of the 23rd Psalm (*The Lord is my shepherd*), otherwise known as the theme tune to *The Vicar of Dibley*, is one of the most widely known of all.

Maurice Ravel wrote his *Trois chansons* in 1915 to assert French culture during the horrors of war, and **Stravinsky** his iconic *Ave Maria* in Paris in the 1930s. The American **Eric Whitacre** is one of the most widely performed choral composers of today; *Water night* offers a sensuous vision of nocturnal peace, while *The seal lullaby* captures the caressing nature and soft billows of **Kipling's** verse. The Norwegian **Ola Gjeilo**, similarly popular with singers the world over, offers religious solace in his setting of *Ubi caritas*. Two further doyens of British music are represented in the programme - **Benjamin Britten** depicts the calm of twilight in *The evening primrose*, while **Richard Rodney Bennett** sets a comforting 17th century verse in *A good-night*. Whitacre's compatriot **Morten Lauridsen** similarly conveys the ecstatic transcendence of night in *Sure on this shining night*, the third of his three *Nocturnes*. We end the programme with a setting of the traditional *Gaelic blessing* by **John Rutter**: "Deep peace of the running wave to you".

Perfect Joy: moments of choral ecstasy to stir your heart

There are many different kinds of music, but the music that communicates most directly is that involving the human voice. Polymnia's programme tonight is designed to send you out into the Edinburgh streets uplifted and inspired, and comprises a cornucopia of choral music, old and new, written to stir and elate.

The joys of love are represented in the music of British composers **Gerald Finzi**, **Gustav Holst**, **William Walton** and the American **Z. Randall Stroope**. The works of the Renaissance composers **Thomas Tallis** and **Ludovico Viadana** convey religious ecstasy and rejoicing, while that of **Tallis's** modern successor **Hubert Parry** presents a radiant vision of "a country far beyond the stars".

The joy of homecoming is the subject of **Stephen Paulus's** setting of the hymn *The road home*, while **Bob Chilcott's** arrangement of **Billy Joel's** song *And so it goes* expresses a sobering but ultimately uplifting view of life and love. The Latvian **Erik Esenvalds** taps into memory and nostalgia in the remarkable *Only in sleep*, with its prominent solo melody, and the American **Eric Whitacre** offers a sensuous nocturnal vision in *Water night*. The Norwegian **Ola Gjeilo** conveys the awesome power of love in *Northern lights*, and religious joy in *Ubi caritas*, reworked from an earlier piece of the same title to incorporate passages for solo piano.

Finally, **Morten Lauridsen's** remarkable set of three *Nocturnes* expresses to perfection differing aspects of joyful existence, from the love-lorn introspection of *Sa nuit d'été* and sheer passion of *Soneto de la noche* to the transcendent and beautiful *Sure on this shining night*.

John Byron Director

John Byron read music at Cambridge University and is active as a conductor, pianist, composer and teacher. Choral music has always been an important part of John's career; he sang in the choir of St. Paul's Cathedral and was formerly MD of the Lincoln Chorale.

He has conducted Polymnia throughout the twelve years of our existence, and has performed with us across the UK as well as in Croatia, Spain, Italy and the Czech Republic. He is well known to many local choirs as a pianist and conductor, and is accompanist for the young mixed choir Coro 94.

He studied piano with John Bigg and Renée Reznik, and has recently continued his studies with Philip Fowke. His concerto repertoire is substantial, and he has performed with orchestras such as the Milton Keynes City Orchestra, the Milton Keynes Sinfonia, the Luton Symphony Orchestra, the Bedford Sinfonia, the Open University Orchestra and the Iceni Ensemble.

In 1980 he was invited to participate in the Park Lane Group series of concerts on the South Bank in London, and he has given solo recitals in many parts of Britain, including the Open University and the British Music Information Centre in London. He is also much in demand as an accompanist, and is harpsichordist with the Baroque ensemble Circa 1685.

John studied composition as a student with Alexander Goehr, and has received several commissions for large-scale works involving chorus, soloists and orchestra. *Two poems by Seamus Heaney* was especially written for two local choirs, the Milton Keynes Chorale and Polymnia. John contributed to the BBC Radio 3 series, *The English Cadence*, and introduced his own choral piece *Verba* in the programme *Choirworks*.



Polymnia



Patron: Lesley Garrett CBE FRAM

The chamber choir Polymnia (named after the Greek muse of sacred song) was formed when a group of friends decided to form a small choir which would sing to a very high standard. It was suggested that we start with a fund-raising concert in the parish of Northill, Bedfordshire in 2006, and we decided to go ahead after one of our members tested the church's acoustics by singing the Habañera from Bizet's *Carmen* in the aisle, much to the surprise of the Vicar. John Byron was subsequently invited to become Musical Director. Since then Polymnia has gone from strength to strength giving concerts, often raising

money for charities, and drawing on local musical expertise for guest instrumentalists and accompanists.

The breadth of music we sing is extremely wide, dating from Renaissance polyphony to contemporary composers, and ranging from the classics to lighter numbers including folk songs, arrangements of songs from shows and musicals, and even film blockbusters by John Williams. One of our concerts, 'Drums and Voices', was a celebration of world music with songs from Africa, Hawaii and Sri Lanka, as well as contemporary European and New World music and items from the Spiritual and Gospel traditions. For this we were joined by a wonderful marimba player, Daniella Ganeva, and some amazing African drummers.

2010 saw our first visit to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival; performances included a wide range of choral music in St Marks artSpace. Under John's direction the choir sang inspiring pieces, from Eric Whitacre's haunting 'Sleep' and Mendelssohn's 'Kyrie Eleison' to the rousing chords of John Williams' 'Hymn to the Fallen' and a sensuous Argentinean tango, 'Verano Porteno' by Piazzolla. A return visit to Edinburgh in 2011 included the spine-tingling Allegri Miserere.

In May 2012 we sang in the Barbican complex at St Giles, Cripplegate, in a performance of the Bach Magnificat with the London Charity Orchestra. This programme also included a full performance of Vivaldi's Four Seasons with the young virtuoso, Thomas Gould.

In 2013 we went to Croatia, where we sang in the Istria Music Festival. This was our first trip abroad and though we had planned to leave two years between this and our next trip, the choir were adamant that they wanted another trip the following year. So in 2014 we travelled to Spain as part of the "Music in the Mountains" Festival, where, as well as performing to an enthusiastic local audience, we sang in the caves at Nerja and gave a concert in the cathedral at Granada. We also had a training day with Stephen Cleobury and an opportunity to sing in the wonderful acoustic of the chapel at Kings College Cambridge. We travelled a little further east in 2015 to take part in the King's Lynn Festival where once again we performed Allegri's Miserere, with the soloists singing from the organ loft.

In 2016 we performed in the prestigious Mantova Chamber Festival in Italy, giving three successful concerts in the Basilica of the Ducal Palace where Monteverdi lived and worked. The audience increased for each concert until it was standing room only for our third performance. We were also invited to sing a concert in Carpenedolo where the local choir, Coro Ars Nova, sang three items and we sang the rest of the concert. They joined us at the end in a moving rendition of Signore delle cime.

2018 saw a trip to Prague, with a rare opportunity to perform in the wonderful cathedral. In Milton Keynes on the eve of Remembrance Day we gave a moving concert of music, images and words that had members of both the choir and audience in tears and marked our first collaboration with Help for Heroes.

In 2016 and 2019 we developed and performed two highly successful concerts in Milton Keynes with Lesley Garrett CBE, our Patron. She said 'I was thrilled at the sound the choir made... you have some excellent singers and together make a beautiful sound'.

More details of all our concerts are available on our website, www.polymnia.org.uk
Our album, **Sacred Choral Music** is available from Amazon, iTunes and streaming services.