

Programme Supplement

Henry Purcell

Purcell lived and worked in London at a time of great change and difficulty, yet of considerable creativity. He was born just at the end of the Cromwellian period during which theatres had been closed and there had been little musical entertainment. When he was six the Great Plague struck killing some 15% of the population of London. To give this some perspective, this year we remember the First World War when, including the flu epidemic, some 3% of the population died. The plague was followed by the Fire of London. So Purcell at a young age witnessed disasters on a scale far beyond our experience.

When Purcell was two Charles II became king and the monarchy was restored, opening the doors again to entertainment. New theatres were built and Purcell wrote operas for them. Politics revolved to a large extent around fear of Catholic France, which was still in a period of relative stability. In 1688, when Purcell was thirty, the Catholic James II was deposed with the arrival of William and Mary.

Purcell was an extraordinary character. He died at the very young age of 36. There is much speculation over the cause of his death; he may have died of chocolate poisoning from drinking cocoa which sometimes grew a toxic mould in transportation, some say his wife locked him out of the house for staying out too late and he caught a chill, but more likely tuberculosis was the cause of his demise.

His music exudes the energy and passion of a young man who, by fate of birth, lived in an England erupting in new-found freedom and debauchery on the restoration of Charles II, an infamous womaniser, lover of music, theatre and the arts and serious partying! Purcell composed some unspeakably rude catches and rounds, which we felt unable to include in this family programme, and was obviously a young man who lived life to the full.

Purcell is an absolute master of the ground bass (the "ground bass" piece you are most likely to know already is Pachelbel's Canon). Compare the Marais Chaconne in the first half of our programme with Purcell's Chaconne from Dioclesian in the second half (a Chaconne always uses a ground bass), and you can hear where Purcell drew some of his ideas from.

His somewhat old-fashioned instrumentation, writing for viols and recorders, similarly follows French fashion. All of the music in tonight's programme was written for the instruments on which it is performed. In the words of Samuel Pepys, "that which did please me beyond anything in the whole world was the wind musique when the Angell comes down, which is so sweet that it ravished me...and did buy a recorder which I do intend to learn to play on, the sound of it being of all sounds in the world most pleasing to me."

Texts

Marc-Antoine Charpentier

Translations of Tenebrae texts

O vos omnes (from the third Tenebrae lesson)

All ye that pass by, behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.

Third lesson for Good Friday

Here beginneth the prayer of the prophet Jeremiah.

Remember, O Lord, what is come on us: consider, and behold our reproach. Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens. We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows. We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold to us. Our necks are under persecution: we labour, and have no rest. We have given the hand to the Egyptians, and to the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread. Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities. Servants have ruled over us: there is none that does deliver us out of their hand. We got our bread with the peril of our lives because of the sword of the wilderness. Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine. They ravished the women in Zion, and the maids in the cities of Judah.

Jerusalem, return to the Lord your God.

Third lesson for Wednesday of Holy Week

YOD - The adversary hath spread out his hand upon all her pleasant things: for she hath seen that the heathen entered into her sanctuary, whom thou didst command that they should not enter into thy congregation.

KAPH - All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their pleasant things for meat to relieve the soul: see, O Lord, and consider; for I am become vile.

LAMED - Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.

MEM - From above hath he sent fire into my bones, and it prevaieth against them: he hath spread a net for my feet, he hath turned me back: he hath made me desolate and faint all the day.

NUN - The yoke of my transgressions is bound by his hand: they are wreathed, and come up upon my neck: he hath made my strength to fall, the Lord hath delivered me into their hands, from whom I am not able to rise up.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, return to the Lord your God.

Lyrics of Purcell songs

Sing, sing ye Druids

Sing, sing ye Druids;
All your Voices raise;
to Celebrate divine Andates Praise.

Thou tun'st this world below

Thou tun'st this World below, the Spheres above,
Who in the Heavenly Round to their own Music
move.

Music for a while

Music for a while
Shall all your cares beguile.
Wond'ring how your pains were eas'd
And disdain to be pleas'd
Till Alecto free the dead
From their eternal bands,
Till the snakes drop from her head,
And the whip from out her hands.

Sound the trumpet

Sound the trumpet, sound the trumpet, sound
the trumpet!
Sound, sound, sound the trumpet till around
You make the list'ning shores rebound.
On the sprightly hautboy play
All the instruments of joy
That skillful numbers can employ,
To celebrate the glories of this day.

Charon the peaceful shade invites

Charon the peaceful shade invites.
He hastes to waft him o'er :
Give him all necessary rites
To land him on the shore.

The bashful Thames

The Bashful Thames, for Beauty so renown'd,
in hast ran by her puny Town;
and poor Augusta was asham'd to own.
Augusta then did drooping lye,
tho' now she rears her Tow'ring Front so high.

In vain the am'rous flute

In vain the Am'rous flute and soft Guitar,
Jointly labour to inspire
Wanton Heat and loose Desire;
Whilst thy chaste Airs do gently move
Seraphic Flames and Heav'nly Love.

An evening hymn

Now, now that the sun hath veil'd his light
And bid the world goodnight;
To the soft bed my body I dispose,
But where shall my soul repose?
Dear, dear God, even in Thy arms,
And can there be any so sweet security!
Then to thy rest, O my soul!
And singing, praise the mercy
That prolongs thy days.
Hallelujah!

Strike the viol

Strike the Viol, touch the Lute;
Wake the Harp, inspire the Flute:
Sing your Patronesse's Praise,
Sing, in cheerful and harmonious Lays.

Hark how the songsters

Hark how the songsters of the grove
Sing anthems to the God of Love.
Hark how each am'rous winged pair
With Love's great praises fills the air,
On ev'ry side the charming sound
Does from the hollow woods rebound.