

YORK
EARLY MUSIC
CHRISTMAS
FESTIVAL

December 2020
National Centre for Early Music

BETHANY SEYMOUR *soprano*
HELEN CHARLSTON *mezzo-soprano*
FREDERICK LONG *bass*
PETER SEYMOUR *harpsichord*

BACCHUS IS A POW'R DIVINE

Bacchus is a pow'r divine, Z360
(*Orpheus Britannicus I*)

Henry Purcell
1659–95

Sound the trumpet, 'til around
(*Come, ye sons of art away*, Z323)

Purcell

Lysander I pursue in vain
(*Amphion Anglicus*)

John Blow
1648/9–1708

Hence fond deceiver, 'Love and Despair', Z492
(*The Theater of Music*)

Purcell

Lovely Selina, innocent and free
(*The Princess of Cleve*)

Blow

'Tis wine was made to rule the day, Z546 **Purcell**
(*Orpheus Britannicus II*)

O dive custos Auriacae domus, 'An elegy upon
the death of Queen Mary', Z504 **Purcell**
(*Three Elegies upon the much lamented loss
of our late most glorious Queen Mary*)

At looser hours (Horace to his lute) **Blow**

A grasshopper and a fly, Z481 **Purcell**
(*The Theater of Music*)

The cares of lovers **Purcell**
(*Timon of Athens, Z632*)

Love quickly is pall'd **Purcell**
(*Timon of Athens, Z632*)

Fill the bowl with rosy wine, Z487 **Purcell**
(*The Theater of Music*)

When the cock begins to crow, ZD172 **Purcell**
(*Orpheus Britannicus II*)

Henry Purcell is generally considered to be England's finest composer; certainly no other composer has equalled the vivid skill and dramatic clarity of his word setting, though his brother Daniel and teacher John Blow run him close. This programme explores secular output for voices, where his particular skill was the amalgamation of contemporary French, Italian and English styles, as well as his heritage of English songs that had been enormously popular since the sixteenth century. The freedom and independence of his part-writing is a particular feature which marks him out from his continental contemporaries.

Much admired by his contemporaries, Purcell was described by Henry Playford in the preface to the first volume of *Orpheus Britannicus* as having 'a peculiar Genius to express the energy of English Words, whereby he mov'd the Passions of all his Auditors', while Henry Hall added in a poem that 'Each Syllable first weigh'd, or short, or long, / That it might too be Sense, as well as Song'.

John Blow was Purcell's teacher and predecessor at Westminster Abbey, a post he vacated in favour of his talented student before resuming the position on Purcell's early death. Both composers shifted their compositional focus from sacred music to works for the theatre after the reigns of Charles II and then James II came to an end, and their successor, William, came to the throne.

There are four main sources for their songs: for Purcell *Orpheus Britannicus* (London, 1698 and 1702, with two subsequent editions) and *The Theater of Music* (1685, 1686, 1687); and for Blow *Amphion Anglicus* (1700).

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TRANSLATION OF LATIN TEXT

O dive custos Auriacae domus
Et spes labantis certior imperi;
O rebus adversis vocande,
O superum decus in secundis

Seu te fluentem pronus ad Isida
In vota fervens Oxonidum chorus,
Seu te precantur, quos remoti
Unda lavat properata Cami

Descende caelo non ita creditas
Visurus aedes praesidiis tuis
Descende visurus penates
Caesaris, et penetrali sacrum.

Maria musis flebilis occidit,
Maria gentis deliciae breves,
O flete Mariam, flete, Camoenae,
O flete, Divae, dea moriente.

O God, guardian of the House of Orange,
and surer hope of fleeting power,
O you who should be invoked in adversity,
O divine ornament in prosperity –

whether the eager choir of Oxford
by the river Isis calls on you in prayer
of they who are washed by the swift stream
of the distant Cam –

come down from heaven to visit with your
help the palace not thus entrusted,
come down and visit the chapel of our
Monarch and the sacred chamber.

Mary is dying, lamented by the Muses,
short-lived darling of her people,
O weep for Mary, O weep you Muses,
O weep you Goddesses, weep for
the dying divinity.