



Director ~ Matthew Berry

**Peter Klatzow**

*Two Songs from the /Xam*

**Cecilia McDowall**

*Photo 51*

**Valentin Silvestrov**

*Prayer for Ukraine*

with works by

Ruth Byrchmore, Rebecca Clarke,  
Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Jackson Hill, Imogen Holst,  
Jane Joseph, Joseph Twist & Ralph Vaughan Williams

**Saturday 18 June 2022 7.30pm**  
**St Margaret's Church, Oxford**

*Please make sure all mobile phones are switched off during the performance*

*Please note that photography and all unauthorised video and audio recording are strictly prohibited.*

**Ralph Vaughan Williams** ~ *A Choral Flourish*

**Imogen Holst** ~ *A Hymne to Christ*

**Jane Joseph** ~ *A Hymn for Whitsuntide*

**Samuel Coleridge-Taylor** ~ *Two Part-Songs*

**Rebecca Clarke** ~ *Three Part-Songs*

**Ruth Byrchmore** ~ *A Birthday*

**Cecilia McDowall** ~ *Photo 51*

**Ralph Vaughan Williams** ~ *Silence and Music*

Interval of 20 minutes  
CDs on sale

**Peter Klatzow** ~ *Two Songs from the /Xam*

**Jackson Hill** ~ *Voices of Autumn*

**Joseph Twist** ~ *On the Night Train*

**Valentin Silvestrov** ~ *Prayer for Ukraine*

**Auditioning for Commotio**

We have vacancies in all voice parts. Anyone interested in auditioning should email Matthew Berry on [info@commotio.org](mailto:info@commotio.org) for more information.

**Ralph Vaughan Williams** [1872-1958]

*A Choral Flourish* (1956)

*A Choral Flourish*, was composed for a large choral event in the Royal Festival Hall in 1956. Although simple in construction, the work, setting text from Psalm 32, displays the confident, semi-contrapuntal style that Vaughan Williams had learnt in his student days.

**Imogen Holst** [1907-1984]

*A Hymne to Christ* (1940)

Holst sets the first two verses of one of the Divine poems by John Donne. The work was written in 1940, a time when she was one of the six music organisers for the wartime Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA). *A Hymne to Christ* was only first published in 1998. Holst studied with Jane Joseph, herself a pupil of her father Gustav.

*In what torne ship soever I embarke,  
That ship shall be my embleme of thy Arke;  
What sea soever swallow mee, that flood  
Shall be to mee an embleme of thy blood;  
Though thou with clouds of anger do  
disguise  
Thy face; yet through that maske I know  
those eyes,  
Which, though they turne away sometimes,  
They never will despise.  
I sacrifice this Iland unto thee,*

*And all whom I lov'd there, and who lov'd  
me;  
When I have put our seas 'twixt them and  
mee,  
Put thou thy sea betwixt my sinnes and  
thee.  
As the tree's sap doth seeke the root below  
In winter, in my winter now I goe,  
Where none but thee, th'Eternall root  
Of true Love I may know.*

John Donne

**Jane Joseph** [1894-1929]

*A Hymn for Whitsuntide* (1922)

The first Whitsun Festival directed by Gustav Holst at Thaxted parish church took place in 1916, with music students from Morley College and pupils from St Paul's Girls' School taking part. It was so successful that it initiated an almost unbroken series for many years, although after the War it moved to churches in London and elsewhere. Beginning with Bach, Purcell, Palestrina and similar composers, Holst soon began to add his own works and those of his students. Jane Joseph was honoured in this way in 1918, and her *Hymn for Whitsuntide*, easy and effective in neo-modal idiom was evidently tried out in 1922, and became a firm favourite from 1924, the year of its publication. After her untimely death, it was sung at the Kensington Competitive Musical Festival under Vaughan Williams's direction, the audience standing in tribute. Holst called it a 'flawless little motet'.

Alan Gibbs

*Fountain of Sweets! Eternal Dove!  
Which leav'st Thy glorious perch above,  
And hovering down, vouchsafest thus  
To make Thy nest below with us.*

*Soft as Thy softest feathers, may  
We find Thy love to us to-day;  
And in the shelter of Thy wing  
Obtain Thy leave and grace to sing.*

Joseph Beaumont

**Samuel Coleridge-Taylor** [1875-1912]

*Song of Proserpine* (1912); *Summer is gone* (1911)

For most of his life, Coleridge-Taylor patiently and stoically withstood the rebuffs and indignities heaped on him by English society because of his colour. At one time he contemplated immigrating to America where players of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra

had already dubbed him their ‘black Mahler’. Nevertheless, for some reason he stuck it out in Croydon. *Song of Proserpine* is a short dramatic setting of Percy Bysshe Shelley’s eponymous poem written in the composer’s final year. *Summer is gone*, the first of two Rossetti settings this evening, was written a year earlier.

*Sacred Goddess, Mother Earth,  
Thou from whose immortal bosom  
Gods and men and beasts have birth,  
Leaf and blade, and bud and blossom,  
Breathe thine influence most divine  
On thine own child, Proserpine.*

*If with mists of evening dew  
Thou dost nourish these young flowers  
Till they grow in scent and hue  
Fairest children of the Hours,  
Breathe thine influence most divine  
On thine own child, Proserpine*  
Percy Bysshe Shelley

*Summer is gone with all its roses,  
Its sun and perfumes and sweet flowers,  
Its warm air and refreshing showers:  
And even Autumn closes.*

*Yea, Autumn's chilly self is going,  
And winter comes which is yet colder;  
Each day the hoar-frost waxes bolder  
And the last buds cease blowing.*  
Christina Rossetti

### **Rebecca Clarke** [1886-1979]

*Come, oh come, my life's delight* (1926); *My spirit like a charmed bark doth float* (1911-12);  
*Weep you no more, sad fountains* (1926)

Clarke, primarily a violist, and one of the very first female professional orchestral players, was virtually unknown as a composer of choral music until posthumous publications began to appear in the 1990s. Clarke wrote choral music over virtually the whole of her career, from the time of her studies with Stanford in 1907 to her revising and recomposing as late as 1976. Clarke’s choral music comprises a survey of some of the most characteristic types of English writing for voices, from the medieval carol through lute-song (as *Weep you no more, sad fountains* here), madrigal, glee and romantic part-song, to a kind of visionary modernism couched in traditional forms.

*Come, oh come, my life's delight* is an adaptation of a song composed in 1923, and according to Clarke’s diaries, she made the choral version on 5 October 1926 “just for practice”. *My spirit like a charmed bark doth float* is one of the few choral compositions by Clarke for which multiple manuscripts survive. Clarke took great trouble over matching Shelley’s text to her winding melodies, and all three manuscripts are heavily revised in this regard. *Weep you no more, sad fountains* is Clarke’s adaptation of a song she composed around 1912 in frank emulation of Dowland.

Notes with thanks to Christopher Johnson and Celia Cobb

### **Ruth Brychmore** [b.1966]

*A Birthday* (2004)  
Solo: Aoife Dudley

This work was commissioned by the Musicians’ Benevolent Fund in the name of Sir Thomas Armstrong. It was first performed at the Festival of Saint Cecilia Service at Westminster Abbey on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2004 by the combined choirs of Westminster Abbey, Westminster Cathedral and St Paul’s Cathedral conducted by James O’Donnell. *A Birthday* was announced the winner of the liturgical category of the British Composer Awards in 2005.

*My heart is like a singing bird  
Whose nest is in a water'd shoot;  
My heart is like an apple-tree  
Whose boughs are bent with thick-set fruit;*

*My heart is like a rainbow shell  
That paddles in a halcyon sea;  
My heart is gladder than all these,  
Because my love is come to me.*

*Raise me a daïs of silk and down;  
Hang it with vair and purple dyes;  
Carve it in doves and pomegranates,  
And peacocks with a hundred eyes;*

*Work it in gold and silver grapes,  
In leaves and silver fleurs-de-lys;  
Because the birthday of my life  
Is come, my love is come to me.*

Christina Rossetti

**Cecilia McDowall** [b.1951]

*Photo 51* (2020)

The composer writes:

*Photo 51* (Seven Ages of Woman) is based on the iconic image taken by Rosalind Franklin, the crystallographer, whose work was central to the understanding of DNA. *Photo 51* marks the centenary of Rosalind Franklin's birth. I commissioned the poet and author Seán Street to create a text based on the iconic image (known as Photo 51) taken by Rosalind Franklin, the chemist and crystallographer whose work was central to the understanding of the molecular structures of DNA. Photo 51 was the critical evidence in identifying the structure of DNA, revealing its double helix structure in the very early fifties. Her work was overlooked when, four years after her death, three men - Wilkins, Crick and Watson - were awarded the Nobel Prize for the discovery of DNA. I knew a little of Rosalind Franklin and her remarkable work in this field but have taken this opportunity to discover more about her. This is also the year of her centenary and it seemed fitting to focus on her part in the discovery of DNA at this time. The number 51 has a resonance for me, too, chiming with the year in which I was born. I find it fascinating to think of Rosalind Franklin's remarkable discoveries unfolding in my early years. The idea of the Double Helix plays a part in both the structure of Seán Street's poem and the texture of my a cappella work, *Photo 51*.

**Ralph Vaughan Williams**

*Silence and Music* (1953)

The poet, librettist and author, Ursula Wood, married Ralph Vaughan Williams in 1953. In the same year, he set her text as his contribution to *A Garland for the Queen*, a collection of 10 short choral works by leading British composers paying tribute to the monarch in her coronation year. The dedication to 'Charles Villiers Stanford and his Blue Bird' is particularly apt given the soprano line floating above the dreamy, unresolved harmonies of the lower voices.

**Interval of 20 minutes**  
**CDs will be on sale**

**Peter Klatzow** [1945-2021]

*Two Songs from the /Xam* (2011)

Peter Klatzow wrote in 2012: 'It was Stephen Watson's slender volume of Versions from the /Xam entitled *Return of the Moon* (Carrefour Press, Cape Town, 1991) which first brought me to a clearer understanding of the luminous and magical world of these very ancient people. They inhabited the Southern part of Africa before the Dutch colonists moved down to settle in the Cape, and before the darker tribes of Africa started emerging from the North. Caught between these two relentless forces the /Xam were treated as little more than vermin. Hunting parties were organised to eliminate them. They were treated largely as thieves and marauders. Few survived the onslaught.

Were it not for the superb efforts of Lucy Lloyd, we would know very little of them. It was she who went to the immense trouble of encountering the strange people who were working on their estate in Mowbray in the Western Cape; learnt (as far as she possibly could) their language, and documented their dreams and mysteries. All of this has been superbly documented in Pippa Skotnes's wonderful volume *Claim to the Country*.

I have taken two poems which are grouped together under the title *The Dawn's Heart Star – two fragments*. They complement each other very well and they both deal with the subject matter of the /Xam's identification with the Night Sky. The /Xam's harmonisation with nature was complete, and had been for 5000 years until the strangers came. When I go down to the coast at Arniston, I sometimes visit the very ancient fish traps which the /Xam built 5000 years ago. They were simple but effective structures which harvested fish as the tide went out.

And so, much of my music memorialises them. *Return of the Moon; Words from a Broken String; Rainmaking with a Bowstring*; and most recently, these two songs for choir. I am deeply indebted to Commotio for many things, and most recently for giving the premiere of the two songs together.'

**Jackson Hill** [b.1941]

*Voices of Autumn* (1982)

*Voices of Autumn (Aki no ko-e)* is one of several choral works that stem from a period following a time the composer spent in Japan on a Fulbright grant studying Buddhist liturgical chant. Hill's setting of the ninth-century poem uses several Japanese stylistic devices; a pentatonic scale, pentatonic harmonies, absence of harmonic motion and chord progressions, minimal rhythmic forward motion, a sense of suspended time, glissandos, and other ornamentation derived from Buddhist chant and ancient Japanese court music. At times, the syllables of the Japanese text serve as an abstract vehicle for the music, and at other time, the setting employs deliberate word painting in making musical reference to footsteps in the fallen leaves and in the cry of the stag. This setting is one of several of Hill's that use Japanese texts to reflect upon the changing seasons of the year.

*In the mountains' heart  
As I trudge through fallen leaves,  
The cry of the stag  
Haunts the forest with its voice  
In the poignant autumn air*

Sarumaru-dayu, translated Jackson Hill

**Joseph Twist** [b.1982]

*On the Night Train* (2006)

*On the Night Train* sets the scene of a train dashing through the Australian bush at dusk, as described by Henry Lawson's graceful poetry. The emptiness of the Australian outback is represented by long, sustained pitches in the opening and closing sections of the work, above which a simple, folk-like melody is sung. This melody is also used throughout a rhythmic contrasting section where the singers create the impression of a moving train with 'scat-like' nonsense syllables and whispered vocal effects.

*Have you seen the bush by moonlight, from the train, go running by?  
Blackened log and stump and sapling, ghostly trees all dead and dry;  
Here a patch of glassy water; there a glimpse of mystic sky?  
Have you heard the still voice calling — yet so warm, and yet so cold:  
"I'm the Mother-Bush that bore you! Come to me when you are old"?*

*Did you see the Bush below you sweeping darkly to the Range,  
All unchanged and all unchanging, yet so very old and strange!  
While you thought in softened anger of the things that did estrange?  
(Did you hear the Bush a-calling, when your heart was young and bold:  
"I'm the Mother-bush that nursed you; Come to me when you are old"?)*

*In the cutting or the tunnel, out of sight of stock or shed,  
Did you hear the grey Bush calling from the pine-ridge overhead:  
"You have seen the seas and cities — all is cold to you, or dead —  
All seems done and all seems told, but the grey-light turns to gold!  
I'm the Mother-Bush that loves you — come to me now you are old"?*

Henry Lawson

**Valentin Silvestrov** [b.1937]  
*Prayer for Ukraine* (2014)

Silvestrov wrote the work in 2014, in response to the Ukrainian Euromaidan protests taking place to protest Russian troops occupying the Crimean peninsula. His response was a fight for his country through art, composing a number of choral works during this time, which were combined into his 'Maiden Cycle of Cycles'. *Prayer for Ukraine* forms a part of this cycle. In the devotional and yearning music, Silvestrov's resistance is manifested through his unshakeable faith in the roots of Ukraine's culture and religion. The work is now being performed worldwide, not only in this choral version, but also in newly published versions for chamber and symphony orchestras.

*Lord, protect Ukraine.  
Give us power, faith and hope... Our Father*

~

**Commotio** was formed in August 1999 to promote neglected contemporary choral repertoire. Performances have included the second UK performance of Alfred Schnittke's mighty *Requiem* and other rarely heard works including Paul Hindemith's *Mass* and Kenneth Leighton's *Mass for Double Choir*, and the world premiere of Pierre Villette's *Inviolata*. Commotio also promotes and performs the works of a younger generation of composers including, most recently, Grace-Evangeline Mason, David Bednall, and Jake Runestad.

Their début CD of South African choral music was released in February 2006, followed by a CD for choir and cello in February 2008. A track from the latter disc, Richard Allain's *Ubi caritas*, was chosen to feature on the Classic FM core playlist and appears in the compilation CD *Smooth Classics – the Ultimate Collection*. The choir recorded a disc of the music of James Whitbourn which was released on the Naxos label (8.572103) in February 2010 and reached no.2 in the *Specialist Classical Chart*. Their second Naxos CD, *In the Heart of Things* (8.572739), the choral works of Francis Pott, was released on the Naxos label in February 2012. In August 2013 Commotio featured as a gala choir at the Association of British Choral Directors' Convention. In November 2013, the choir's fifth CD *The Rose in the Middle of Winter – Carols by Bob Chilcott* was released and reached no.1 in the *Specialist Classical Chart*.

Commotio's sixth recording, featuring jazz-inspired choral works by Bob Chilcott, was released in September 2017 and reached no.11 in the UK Jazz Charts. The choir gave the first UK performance of Rolande Falcinelli's *Messe de Sainte Dominique* in June 2018 and in March 2019 they embarked on their seventh recording featuring Francis Pott's *Word* and his new work for cello and double choir, *At First Light* (released July 2020).

Commotio celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in September 2019, with a reunion concert of current and past choir members. Works included the 24-part *In Nomine* by Bo Holten, Pierre Villette's *Attende Domine*, and the world premiere of Richard Allain's *Music*, commissioned and written for the occasion. Post-pandemic, Commotio returned under the direction of Will Dawes and Sarah Tenant-Flowers.

**Matthew Berry**, the conductor and joint-founder of the choir, studied music at University College, Oxford, where he was Organ Scholar and then Assistant Organist. He has studied organ under David Sanger, David Goode and Ian Curror. After conducting The Oxford Chamber Choir for two years as a student, he founded Commotio in 1999. Having finished his degree, he studied post-graduate choral direction with Patrick Russill for two years at the Royal Academy of Music in London.

His expertise lies in the research and promotion of little-known contemporary choral repertoire, principally from Scandinavia, South Africa, the United States and Slovenia. In 23 years working with Commotio he has initiated many and premieres including, most recently the, UK Premiere of Falcinelli's *Messe de Sainte-Dominique*.

In February 2013, the Governing Body of the Royal Academy of Music elected Matthew as Associate of Royal Academy of Music (ARAM), an award to 'former students who have made a significant contribution to the music profession'.

Matt now lives in Sudan working in journalism and music editing.

<b>Sopranos</b>	<b>Altos</b>	<b>Tenors</b>	<b>Basses</b>
Alex Burgar	Anne-Marie Boylan	Tim Ambrose	Hugh Conway Morris
Frances Buttigieg	Helen Burn	Michael Hosking	John Kay
Aoife Dudley	Laura Jones	Tim Nightingale	Moray McConnachie
Francesca Mosely	Emily Pillinger	Julian Woodward	Michael Rowley
Anne Marie Lo	Griselda Sherlaw- Johnson		
Kate Smith	Helen Swan		
	Pippa Thynne		

**Commotio are immensely grateful for the support of our Friends**

Bryant and Margaret Ambrose  
Judith Godsland  
Diana and Keith Gabriel  
Anne Mackintosh and Michael Gardiner

*Anyone interested in becoming a Friend can find more information at [www.commotio.org/friends](http://www.commotio.org/friends)*

**Commotio would like to thank the following for their invaluable help**

All at St John the Evangelist, Iffley Road  
George Parris  
Griselda Sherlaw-Johnson  
St Margaret's Church, Oxford



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