

# *Are You Sitting Comfortably?*

**The Nantwich Singers**  
**Tim Sagar/Annabel Nielsen, piano**

## ***Programme***

<i>Sing, my Child</i>	Sarah Quartel (b.1983)
<i>Lilliburlero</i>	Michael Tippett (1905-1998)
<i>The Silver Swan</i>	Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625)
<i>Trois beaux oiseaux du Paradis</i>	Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)
<i>Choral Dances from Gloriana</i>	Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)
<i>Pápaine</i>	György Ligeti (1923-2006)
<i>The Goslings</i>	Frederick Bridge (1844-1924)
<i>Aesop's Fables</i>	Bob Chilcott (b.1955)

*“Are you sitting comfortably?”* These familiar words form the title of our summer concert this year, and announce the theme of story-telling. Fables and folk tales, cautionary tales and laments, political, war-like, romantic and historical tales - all are represented here. A recurring theme is the power of music itself, as found in the opening item by Sarah Quartel, and in the final of Chilcott’s settings of Aesop’s *Fables*. Another theme is birds: specifically swans and geese, together or alone; but again, with music of central significance.

### ***Sing, my Child***

**Sarah Quartel**

*Sing for the promise in each new morning,  
 Song for the hope in a new day dawning.  
 All around is beauty bright!  
 Wake in the morning and sing, my child.  
 Dance in the joy of the day unfolding.  
 Dance as you work and dance as you’re learning.  
 All around is beauty bright!  
 Take in the day and dance, my child.  
     *But when troubles come and worry is all that can be found,  
     Gather your strength and hear your voice. Sing, my child.*  
 Laugh in the cool and the fresh of the ev’ning.  
 Laugh in your triumph laugh in succeeding.  
 All around is beauty bright!  
 Rest in the ev’ning and laugh, my child.  
 Peace in the stillness and dark of the night.  
 Peace in the dreams of your silent delights.  
 All around is beauty bright!  
 Sleep in the night and peace, my child.  
     *But when troubles come and worry is all that can be found,  
     Gather your strength and hear your voice.*  
 Sing, my child. Dance, my child. Laugh, my child.  
 Peace, my child, oh, peace my child.*

This delightful modern folk song embodies joy in the abundance of life and the life-affirming power of art. A parent exhorts a child to embrace the wonder of being alive and finding fulfilment in music, dance, laughter, and peace. Quartel opens with a lyrical but sprightly melody which flows gracefully like a babbling brook (despite the potentially treacherous 7/8 metre). Structured like a folk song with phrases that are repeated, and verses following the same pattern, it also includes two short meditative interludes of hymn-like calm - a pause in the dance of life, which acknowledges that life is not all sweetness and light, but promises that being true to oneself can overcome many challenges.

The composer's website says: *Sing, my Child sets a joyful text celebrating the beauty found all around us in everyday life. Characterized by tight harmonies and a dynamic percussion line, the buoyant 7/8 metre of the opening drives the piece forward. Lush harmonies colour the hymn-like B section as the text evolves into a call for strength despite the troubles that may come.* [<https://www.singers.com/composers/Sarah-Quartel/>]

### **Lilliburlero**

### **Michael Tippett (1905-1998)**

From Quartel's heartfelt encouragement to a scarcely veiled threat from Tippett. This is one of a group of four folk songs from the British Isles given new arrangements by Tippett in 1957. The original melody has sometimes been attributed to Purcell but with no strong evidence, although Purcell certainly did use the melody. It was soon pressed into service as a rousing, military song with words to suit the occasion; specifically the appointment of Lord Talbot to the position of Lord Lieutenant of

Ireland in 1687, and revealing a strong anti-Catholic feeling. Later, children sang rather different words to the same melody: *“There was an old woman tossed up in a basket, seventy times as high as the moon”*.

Here, Tippett has used just a few words from the 1686 version and the majority of the piece manipulates the refrain in various jaunty ways. The vigorous introduction requires some vocal acrobatics before the familiar melody first enters in the lower parts. Crunching dissonances and false relations give this an edgy, almost aggressive feel, creating a menacing juxtaposition with the dance-like rhythms and the jaunty “lilliburlero” repetitions. Tippett effortlessly combines these aspects and the result is at times unnerving. One would not wish to hear this being sung by any armed group in the vicinity.

*Lilliburlero, bullen a la  
Ho! broder Teague dost hear de decree,  
Lilliburlero, bullen a la.  
Dat we shall have a new deputie,  
Lilliburlero, bullen a la.  
Ho! By Shaint Tyburn't is de Talbote,  
Lilliburlero, bullen a la.  
And he will cut all de English troate,  
Lilliburlero, bullen a la.*

*Anon*

### ***The Silver Swan***

**Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625)**

This miniature masterpiece of the 17th century encapsulates a universal lament with supreme economy.

Gibbons generally maintained a preference for sacred music rather than madrigals, although he was not averse to sardonic commentary on the frivolousness of madrigals through that very medium, as some of our audience may remember from last summer's programme, and *'The Learned Poets'*. No satire here, however. This well-loved madrigal was published in a collection in 1612 (as was *The Learned Poets*), and dedicated to Sir Christopher Hatton. In the dedication Gibbons wrote, "*They were most of them composed in your owne house and doe therefore properly belong to you, as Lord of the Soile; the language they speak you provided them, I onely them with Tongues to utter the same.*"

The melodic structure is simple: ABCDCD; and the parts move in gentle counterpoint, as effortlessly as the swimming of a swan on calm waters. The use of major tonality throughout despite the mood of despair gives it an almost unbearable poignancy.

*The silver swan, who living had no note,  
When death approached unlocked her silent throat;  
Leaning her breast against the reedy shore,  
Thus sung her first and last, and sung no more:  
"Farewell, all joys, O death come close mine eyes;  
More geese than swans now live, more fools than wise."*

*Christopher Hatton (d.1619)*

### ***Trois beaux oiseaux du Paradis* Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)**

In a letter to a friend, Ravel wrote:

*Since the day before yesterday this sounding of alarms, these weeping women, and, above all, this terrible enthusiasm of the young people and of all the friends who have had to go and of whom I have no news. I cannot bear it*

*any longer. The nightmare is too horrible. I think that at any moment I shall go mad or lose my mind. I have never worked so hard, with such insane, heroic rage...Just think...of the horror of this conflict. It never stops for an instant. What good will it all do?*

In complete contrast of mood to *The Silver Swan*, this deeply felt song by Maurice Ravel focuses on the pity and horror of war, but especially as felt by the individual. "*Mon (ton) ami z'il est à la guerre*" is repeated in every short verse. The deceptively sweet opening melody, supported by gently moving chromatic harmonies, characteristically avoids classical tonality, and gives the lie to the idyllic mood suggested.

Begun in 1914, the song was written in response to the outbreak of the First World War, as Ravel was waiting to enlist, and taking driving lessons to expedite this. He wrote the text himself, and both text and music hark back to 16C chansons.

*Trois beaux oiseaux du Paradis,  
(Mon ami z-il est à la guerre),  
Trois beaux oiseaux du Paradis  
Ont passé par ici.*

*Le premier était plus bleu que le ciel,  
(Mon ami z-il est à la guerre),  
Le second était couleur de neige,  
Le troisième rouge vermeil.*

*"Beaux oiselets du Paradis,  
(Mon ami z-il est à la guerre),  
Beaux oiselets du Paradis,  
Qu'apportez par ici?"*

*"J'apporte un regard couleur d'azur,  
(Ton ami z-il est à la guerre)"  
"Et moi, sur beau front couleur de neige,  
Un baiser dois mettre, encore plus pur."*

*"Oiseau vermeil du Paradis,  
(Mon ami z-il est à la guerre),  
Oiseau vermeil du Paradis,  
Que portez-vous ainsi?"*

*"Un joli cœur tout cramoisi,  
(Ton ami z-il est à la guerre)."  
"Ah! je sens mon cœur qui froidit . . .  
Emportez-le aussi."*

*Three beautiful birds from Paradise,  
(My friend is at the wars),  
Three beautiful birds from Paradise  
Have passed this way.*

*The first was bluer than the sky,  
(My friend is at the wars),  
The second was the colour of snow,  
The third vermilion red.*

*'Beautiful little birds from Paradise,  
(My friend is at the wars),  
Beautiful little birds from Paradise,  
What are you bringing here?'*

*'I bring a pair of blue eyes,  
(Your friend is at the wars),  
I, upon your fair snowy brow,  
Must place a still purer kiss.'*

*'Vermilion bird from Paradise,  
(My friend is at the wars),  
Vermilion bird from Paradise,  
Tell me what you are bringing?'*

*'A pretty heart, all crimson,  
(Your friend is at the wars).'  
'Ah, I feel my heart growing cold . . .  
Bear it away as well.'*

*Translated by Richard Stokes.*

These dances form part of a masque performed for Queen Elizabeth in Act 2 of Britten's 1954 opera *Gloriana*. "*Dancers representing Time and Concord, country girls and young rustics and fishermen all pay homage and tribute to the Queen.*"

As we are led through these charming miniatures we flit from lively dance to solemn chant and back again with Britten's characteristic fleetness of foot and fresh, spiky energy. The first is 'Time', with the designation "*quick and gay*". The lively soprano melody is complemented by cross rhythms in the altos and tenors, and a chime-like bass line evoking the 'tick-tock' of a grandfather clock. There is a spooky middle section ("Grotesque") referencing "*a bearded ancient with a scythe*", but he is fast put to flight with the return of Time - "*young and strong in his prime*". 'Concord' brings a complete contrast - slow, calm, gentle in dynamic, and embodying the notion of concord and peace. In 'Time and Concord' Britten playfully tosses the melody about with close canon between upper and lower voices, before ending with a joyful homage to the Queen, who "*hath all our love!*" 'Country Girls' is essentially a list of wild flowers, creating "*Norfolk's own garlands for her Queen*", and 'Rustics and Fishermen', similarly, lists the gifts that they can offer: "*From fen and meadow in rushy basket, they bring ensamples of all they grow*". The masque ends with the "smooth and gracious" presentation of gifts to the Queen.

The text is by William Plomer (1903-1973), librettist for a number of Britten's works, who captures the sensibility of the historical setting skilfully and imaginatively.

### 1. Time

*Yes, he is Time, Lusty and blithe! Time is at his apogee!  
Although you thought to see a bearded ancient with a scythe,  
No reaper he that cries "Take heed!"  
Time is at his apogee! Young and strong and in his prime!  
Behold the sower of the seed!*

### 2. Concord

*Concord, concord is here our days to bless  
And this our land to endue with plenty, peace and happiness.  
Concord and Time each needeth each:  
The ripest fruit hangs where not one, but only two can reach.*

### 3. Time and Concord

*From springs of bounty, through this one country,  
Streams abundant of thanks shall flow.  
Where life was scanty, fruits of plenty swell resplendent from earth  
below!  
No Greek nor Roman Queenly woman knew such favour from Heav'n  
above  
As she whose presence is our pleasance  
Gloriana hath all our love!*

### 4. Country Girls

*Sweet flag and cuckoo flower, cowslip and columbine,  
King cups and sops in wine, flower deluce and calaminth,  
Harebell and hyacinth, myrtle and bay, with rosemary between,  
Norfolk's own garlands for her Queen.*

### 5. Rustics and Fishermen

*From fen and meadow in rushy baskets  
They bring ensamples of all they grow.  
In earthen dishes their deep-sea fishes;  
Yearly fleeces, woven blankets;  
New cream and junkets and rustic trinkets on wicker flaskets,  
Their country largess, the best they know.*

### 6. Final Dance of Homage

*These tokens of our love receiving,  
O take them, Princess great and dear,  
From Norwich city you are leaving,  
That you afar may feel us near.*

*William Plomer, 1903-1973*

## ***Pápainé***

## **György Ligeti (1923-2006)**

From the joyful celebration of a monarch's visit to the biting irony and unmitigated brutality of this rendition of a Hungarian folk tale by Ligeti (1953). There is no moral to this story, no improving lesson to be learned, no solace to be gained. The story is soon told: nine armed horsemen are riding out. They meet a widow and decide to murder her. They murder her, and ride off.

Ligeti uses this shocking story to weave a miniature musical nightmare. A jolly folk-like melody opens the song, but very soon more and more extreme discords are introduced, like evil spirits appearing and polluting an idyllic landscape. The story is told almost in the manner of a Greek chorus: no commentary, just saying: *"this happened"*.

*Oh, the highway, oh, the road is long and wide,  
And along it ride nine robbers side by side.  
Each a gun has, slung across a brawny arm,  
And they ride to Widow Papai's little farm.  
"Mistress Papai, God be with you on this day!"  
"Thank you, sirs, I hope that luck attends your way!"  
"Mistress Papai, that's a wish that you will rue,  
For tonight we're going to cut your throat for you!"  
"Oh! Oh! Oh!"  
"Dearest daughter, hurry to the cellar deep,  
Get a jug of wine, the very best we keep!"  
"Mistress Papai, your best wine will do no good,  
For tonight we're going to spill your rich red blood!"*

*“Oh! Oh! Oh!”*

*Widow Papai swiftly to the courtyard runs,  
Shuts her eyes, so she no longer sees the guns;  
“God, my Saviour, I my sins must now Thee tell,  
Or these thieves will send my poor soul straight to hell!”*

*“Oh! Oh! Oh!”*

*On the highway, on the road so long and wide,  
Widow Papai’s taken for a final ride.  
Carried through the black and narrow graveyard gate,  
Widow Papai there for Judgment Day must wait.*

### ***The Goslings***

### **Frederick Bridge (1844-1924)**

By way of complete contrast and returning to the avian theme, this comic song by the relatively little known Frederick Bridge offers some Edwardian whimsy, with faux-pathos and more anthropomorphism than you can shake a stick at. Great fun and light of touch despite the melodrama, the song’s structure is standard strophic (verses), and the melody and harmony, for the most part, are eminently reliably late-19th century parlour-song. Bridge includes a witty reference to Mendelssohn’s Wedding March, and a liberal scattering of disconcerting discords to season the mix. Composer, organist, teacher and writer, Bridge composed and organised music for various royal occasions, including Queen Victoria’s Jubilee and Edward VII’s coronation. He was a great admirer of Samuel Pepys, and also pioneered authentic performance of Messiah, specifically in terms of orchestration. *The Times* newspaper remarked:

*There have been those who said that he was not a great organist, and who disputed the accuracy of his scholarship. Perhaps it is not possible to do all the things Sir Frederick Bridge did and do them all well. He*

*never claimed that he did them all well; he claimed that he did them, and took an immense delight in doing and in talking about it afterwards. ... "Spy's "well-known cartoon of him, with "Basso Continuo" under his arm and Pepys's Diary protruding from his pocket, exactly describes him. Pepys was his lifelong friend, and, like him, Bridge went through life dwelling on the things that did please him mightily."*

Bridge himself once commented with self-deprecating wryness that he had composed a considerable amount of serious music which no-one particularly wanted to hear, as opposed to his very comic songs (such as this one) which were very popular. It sounds as though he certainly had a sense of humour.

*The Goslings* is not particularly amusing to vegetarians, of course, and very much of its time, 1913; but it is astonishing to think this was only a year before Ravel composed his '*Trois beaux oiseaux*'.

The poet F E Weatherly also wrote the lyrics to '*Danny Boy*', '*The Holy City*' and '*Roses of Picardie*'.

*She was a pretty little gosling,  
And a gay young gosling he;  
And "I love you," he said, "so dearly;"  
And "I love you too," said she.  
But "alas! we must part," he whispered,  
"I'm off to the world so wide;  
But love, don't fear, I'll come next year,  
And make you my little bride!"*

*'Twas Michaelmas day at morning,  
That he came home once more,  
He met his true love's mother,  
And oh! she was weeping sore.  
"Too late, you've come," she whispered,  
"They've taken your love away,  
She never will be your bride, ah, me!  
For she's going to be cooked today!"*

*Then up he went to the farm house:  
 "Where is my love?" he said;  
 But the farmer's wife,  
 She seized a knife, and cut off his little head.  
 And she served him up with his true love,  
 On a dish so deep and wide,  
 So though in life they were parted,  
 In death they were side by side.*

*F. E. Weatherly (1848-1928)*

### ***Aesop's Fables***

### **Bob Chilcott (b.1955)**

Aesop was the master of pithy economy. There is no superfluous detail, no filling out of the story with extra characters or incident, just one central event, with the moral presented at the end. Chilcott honours that economical approach and gets stuck in straight away with a musical encapsulation of mood by the piano to set the scene before the story's title is spoken, in rhythm, by the choir. Each story unfolds with the wonderful inevitability of the fables. The choir rhythmically declaims the moral at the end.

The final song in this set returns to one of our themes - swans and geese - this time in praise of music, which can, according to Aesop, "delay death".

#### **1. The Hare and the Tortoise**

*A Hare one day ridiculed the short feet and slow pace of the Tortoise, who replied, laughing, 'Though you are swift as the wind, I will beat you in a race.' The Hare, believing her assertion to be simply impossible, assented to the proposal; and they agreed that the Fox should choose the course and fix the goal. On the day appointed for the race the two started together. The Tortoise never for a moment stopped, but went on with a slow but steady*

pace straight to the end of the course. The Hare, lying down by the wayside, fell asleep. At last waking up, and moving as fast as he could, he saw that the Tortoise had reached the goal, and was comfortably dozing after her fatigue. **'Slow but steady wins the race.'**

## 2. The Mountain in Labour

A mountain was once greatly agitated. Loud groans and noises were heard, and crowds of people came from all parts to see what was the matter. While they assembled in anxious expectation of some terrible calamity, out came a Mouse. **'Don't make much ado about nothing.'**

## 3. The Fox and the Grapes

A famished Fox saw some clusters of ripe black grapes hanging from a trellised vine. She resorted to all her tricks to get at them, but wearied herself in vain, for she could not reach them. At last she turned away, hiding disappointment and saying: 'The Grapes are sour, and not ripe as I thought.' **'Sour Grapes.'**

## 4. The North Wind and the Sun

The North Wind and the Sun disputed as to which was the most powerful, and agreed that he should be made the victor who could first strip a wayfaring man of his clothes. The North Wind first tried his power and blew with all his might, and the keener his blasts, the closer the Traveller wrapped his cloak around him, until at last, resigning all hope of victory, the Wind called to the Sun to see what he could do. The Sun suddenly shone out with all his warmth. The Traveller no sooner felt his genial rays that he took off one garment after another, and at last, overcome with heat, undressed and bathed in a stream that lay in his path. **'Persuasion is better than Force.'**

## 5. The Goose and the Swan

A certain rich man bought in the market a Goose and a Swan. He fed the one for his table and kept the other for the sake of its song. When the time came for killing the Goose, the cook went to get him at night, when it was dark, and was not able to distinguish one bird from the other. By mistake he caught the Swan instead of the Goose. The Swan, threatened with death, burst forth into song, and made himself known by his voice, and preserved his life by his melody. **'Music can delay death.'**

Bob Chilcott writes: "Aesop, supposedly a slave in Ancient Greece, lived sometime during the sixth century BC, but his wisdom is timeless, as is seen in these stories that are still enjoyed by both children and adults all

*over the world. I have used the translation made in the nineteenth century by the Reverend George Flyer Townsend, and have set only five of more than six hundred that were supposedly written by Aesop. At the beginning of each story in my setting the title is spoken as is the moral that comes at the end. I imagined these lines being spoken with great character, unhitched, and in the mood of the song. The final song in the set, 'The Goose and the Swan', is appropriately about singing. I have underpinned this song with a wonderful harmonic progression taken from 'Du bist die Ruh' by the king of all song writers, Franz Schubert."*

## The Nantwich Singers

Musical Director: Ian Crawford

### *Soprano*

Annabel Nielsen  
Lyn Bright  
Becky Daniels  
Jane Riddle  
Barbara Arch  
Katy Robinson

### *Alto*

Gilly Liebeck  
Marjorie Seddon  
Jan Campbell  
Rachael Parkinson  
Rachel Duerden  
Anne-Marie Naylor

### *Tenor*

Liam Tyler-Murphy  
William Hall  
John Duthie  
Harry Dichmont

### *Bass*

David Guest  
Quentin Duerden  
David Burrowes  
Joe Daniels

### New Singers - Join us!

We are always pleased to hear from singers who are interested in joining us. Tenors and Basses are especially welcome. It is important to have some experience of singing choral music and to be a reasonably good sight reader. Commitment to a challenging and wide-ranging repertoire is essential. We rehearse every Tuesday during term time between 7.30 and 9pm at St Mary's Church, Nantwich. For a short, informal audition with our musical director, please contact us via our website: [www.thenantwicksingers.org](http://www.thenantwicksingers.org).

## **Forthcoming Events 2024**

**November 23rd 12 noon "Festival Organ Prom"  
at the Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent**

**December 15th 3pm "Christmas Concert"  
at St Mary's, Nantwich**