



CLARE HALL
CAMBRIDGE

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Clare Hall Dining Hall, Herschel
Road, Cambridge, CB3 9AL

SONGS OF LOVE AND DEVOTION

Grace Davidson, soprano
Julian Perkins, harpsichord



Susan Porter Thomas



Photo by Sam Canetty-Clarke

*A selection from Henry Purcell, George Frideric
Handel, Thomas Campion, Pelham Humfrey, John
Dowland, and Alessandro and Domenico Scarlatti*

Songs of Love and Devotion

Grace Davidson, soprano
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Henry Purcell
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Sweeter than Roses
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Adagio
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Adagio
Allegro

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Handel
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Henry Purcell (1659 - 1695)

By the end of Henry Purcell's short life, he would be remembered not only as a great composer of the Baroque era, but also as one of the greatest composers England had ever produced. His output for a life that was cut so short was considerable, writing for the church, stage, Court, and private entertainment, and in all of these branches of composition he showed an obvious admiration for the past combined with a willingness to learn from his contemporaries in France and Italy.

If Music be the Food of Love

A song of ardent love, 'If music be the food of love', is thought by some to be a setting of a Shakespearean text, however the only direct quotation is the first line, which matches the opening seven words heard from the character Orsino in *Twelfth Night*. Purcell set this text, by one Colonel Henry Heveningham, twice in the 1690s, and made two slightly different versions of the first setting. The first version of the earlier setting includes only the first verse of poetry; the alternate version, published in the *Gentleman's Journal* of June 1692, sets both verses. This song was made famous in modern times by the countertenor Alfred Deller in the version arranged by Sir Michael Tippett and Walter Bergmann.

*If music be the food of love,
Sing on till I am fill'd with joy;
For then my list'ning soul you move
To pleasures that can never cloy.
Your eyes, your mien, your tongue declare
That you are music ev'rywhere.*

*Pleasures invade both eye and ear,
So fierce the transports are, they wound,
And all my senses feasted are,
Tho' yet the treat is only sound,
Sure I must perish by your charms,
Unless you save me in your arms.*

Sweeter than Roses

'Sweeter than roses' is the song of a woman intoxicated by a single kiss. The vocal line is always extraordinarily attentive to the text; note the explicit word-painting of the word 'trembling' and 'freeze', with extended melismas and quivering semiquavers. The first section of the song is an extension of this frozen feeling in its contemplative nature, but it abruptly changes mood with the words 'then shot like fire'. The song ends in happy contrast to the opening mood with the singer repeating 'victorious love' no less than six times!

*Sweeter than roses, or cool evening breeze
On a warm flowery shore, was the dear kiss,
First trembling made me freeze,
Then shot like fire all o'er.
What magic has victorious love!
For all I touch or see since that dear kiss,
I hourly prove, all is love to me.*

Fairest Isle

The song 'Fairest Isle' comes from the incidental music in Purcell's semi-opera *King Arthur*. Premiered in 1691 and with a libretto by John Dryden, the song is sung by Venus in praise of the island of Britain as the home of love. Once described by Jack Westrup as a 'spacious tune' that expressed an unostentatious 'patriotism of the spirit' rather than the patriotism of banners and bugles, 'Fairest Isle' is one of the most beautiful and enduringly popular songs Purcell ever composed.

*Fairest Isle, all Isles Excelling,
Seat of Pleasure and of Love;
Venus, here, will choose her Dwelling,
and forsake her Cyprian grove.*

*Gentle Murmurs, sweet Complaining,
Sighs that blow the Fire of Love;
Soft Repulses, kind Disdaining,
shall be all the Pains you prove.*

*Cupid from his Fav'rite Nation,
Care and Envy will Remove;
Jealousie, that poysons Passion,
and Despair that dies for Love.*

*Every Swain shall pay his Duty,
grateful every Nymph shall prove;
And as these Excel in Beauty,
those shall be Renown'd for Love.*

George Frideric Handel (1685 - 1759)

Suite no 2 in F major HWV 427 for harpsichord *Adagio, Allegro, Adagio, Allegro*

While Handel is now best known for his operas and oratorios, he was also a celebrated keyboard virtuoso and improviser. Legend even relates that such was his devotion to playing that the keys of his Ruckers harpsichord were 'hollowed out like spoons'.

He published his *Eight Great Suites* in 1720 in response to 'Surreptitious [sic] and incorrect copies of them' being issued. In the Suite in F major, the two slow movements exude spellbinding lyricism. There is a wistfulness to the opening Adagio in which the right hand spins a melody over a regular pulse in the left, while the meditative Sarabande combines the dance's often dual qualities of sensuousness and grace. By contrast, the first Allegro is a fizzy Italian Corrente that provides a good workout for the right hand. The final movement is a four-part fugue that Mozart transcribed for string quartet in order to strengthen his contrapuntal muscle.

Thomas Campion (c. 1567 - 1620)

Thomas Campion was among the most prolific of the English lute-song writers, with around 120 extant songs to his credit. Among his contemporaries he was unique in writing all his own texts. He studied both at Cambridge (where his interest in medicine appears to have been stimulated) and in France, receiving a degree from the University of Caen in 1605. During his lifetime he achieved fame as both poet and composer, and from 1607 was one of those who supplied texts and music for the lavish masques and entertainments provided for James I. His first published songs were printed by Rosseter in 1601, but it was not until 1613 that his first two *Bookes of Ayres* appeared in print, followed four years later by the third and fourth volumes. The quality of his lute songs was variable (he wrote only in this genre), but his understanding of the English language gave him a remarkable ability to match the rhythms of his words with music.

Never Weather-Beaten Sail

Thought and expression, text and setting were blessed by an exceptional, interdependent creation in Campion's songs. He wrote, 'In these English Ayres I have chiefly aymed to couple my Words and Notes lovingly together, which will be much for him to doe that hath not power over both.' Campion impresses as a composer whose lightness of touch reveals and lays bare. Admiration for him as a poet began to resurface in the late nineteenth century, and T. S. Eliot pronounced him, 'except for Shakespeare... the most accomplished master of rhymed lyric of his time'. In this short song there is nothing superfluous. Simple imagery paints pictures. We might see a prefiguration of the voyage of the Mayflower of 1620, as the exhausted pilgrim

bravely endures the perilous high seas in pursuit of God's radiant paradise. And shockingly, we overhear the Puritan's urgent moans of desire to be taken by his sweet Lord.

*Never weather-beaten sail more willing bent to shore.
Never tired pilgrim's limbs affected slumber more,
Than my wearied sprite now longs to fly out of my troubled breast:
O come quickly, sweetest Lord, and take my soul to rest.*

*Ever blooming are the joys of Heaven's high Paradise.
Cold age deafs not there our ears nor vapour dims our eyes:
Glory there the sun outshines whose beams the blessed only see:
O come quickly, glorious Lord, and raise my sprite to thee!*

Author of Light

Here the poet discloses his dark night of the soul, an anguished spiritual desolation which God alone can relieve. The phrase Author of Light suggests Plato's famous allegory of the Cave, but Campion easily fastens a Christian meaning to it. God created the light, and it is a symbol of God himself and of heaven. Light is also truth and understanding. Jesus' saving act as 'the light of the world' was to descend into human darkness and transform it. Campion is painfully conscious that this life is deficient or as Saint Paul wrote, 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.' (I Corinthians 13:12) The phrase, 'God his owne will guard' signals the Protestant cultivation of the tricky concept of the elect, that God chooses and protects some but not others.

*Author of light, revive my dying spright,
Redeeme it from the snares of all-confounding night.
Lord, light me to thy blessed way:
For, blinde with worldly vaine desires, I wander as a stray.
Sunne and Moone, Starres and underlights I see,
But all their glorious beames are mists and darkness, being compar'd to thee.*

*Fountaine of health, my soules deepe wounds recure,
Sweet showres of pittie raine, wash my uncleannesse pure.
One drop of thy desired grace
The faint and fading hart can raise, and in ioyes bosome place.
Sinne and Death, Hell and tempting Fiends may rage;
But God his owne will guard, and their sharp paines and grief in time asswage.*

Pelham Humfrey (1647 - 1674)

A Hymne to God the Father

A Hymne to God the Father is English Metaphysical poet John Donne's prayer for forgiveness. Enumerating his sins, the poem's speaker worries that God could never forgive them all—until he realises that believing God couldn't forgive him is the silliest sin of all.

*Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun
Which is my sin though it were done before?
Wilt thou forgive those sins, through which I run
And do run still, though still I do deplore?*

*When thou hast done, thou hast not done
For I have more*

*Wilt thou forgive that sin by which I've won
Others to sin? And made my sin their door?
Wilt thou forgive that sin which I did shun
A year or two: but wallow'd in, a score?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done
For I have more*

*I have a sin of fear, that when I've spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
But swear by thy self, that at my death thy Son
Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore;
And having done that, thou hast done
I fear no more.*

Henry Purcell (1659 - 1695)

An Evening Hymn

An Evening Hymn is a complete contrast to the music that one normally associates with Purcell's writing for the church. Here there is no question of impressing a Sunday congregation in the Chapel Royal, but instead a quite private and penitential attitude to God. Based on a five-bar ground, the work is a wonderful example of Purcell's skill at handling the form, with the vocal entries adjusted to disguise repetitions of the bass, and a modulation introduced for variety in the middle of the piece. The quietly ecstatic 'Hallelujah' that takes up the last forty bars or so is very different, but no less effective, to the settings normally heard of that word. There is surely no better example of the craftsmanship and genius of the man who, arguably Britain's greatest composer, so richly deserved Playford's accolade that he was the 'all-pleasing British Orpheus'.

*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!*

Interval

John Dowland (c1563 - 1626)

Come again! Sweet love doth now invite

Dowland was a composer who lived and worked in England, but little is known of his early life. It is generally thought he was born in London, but there is a piece of evidence to suggest Dublin may have been his place of origin. He dedicated the song *From silent night* to 'my

loving countryman John Forster the younger, merchant of Dublin in Ireland'. The Forsters were a prominent Dublin family at the time, providing several lord Mayors to the city.

Included in his *First Book of Songs*, *Come again sweet love doth now invite* is a bitter-sweet song, typical of Dowland who cultivated a melancholic style. The first two verses are addressed to the lover.

*Come again!
Sweet love doth now invite
Thy graces that refrain
To do me due delight,
To see, to hear, to touch, to kiss, to die,
With thee again in sweetest sympathy.*

*Come again!
That I may cease to mourn
Through thy unkind disdain
For now, left and forlorn
I sit, I sigh, I weep, I faint, I die,
In deadly pain and endless misery.*

*Gentle Love,
Draw forth thy wounding dart,
Thou canst not pierce her heart;
For I, that do approve
By sighs and tears more hot than are thy shafts
Did tempt while she for triumph laughs.*

Flow my Tears

One of the most famous of Dowland's lute songs comes from his second book, published in 1600, the lament *Flow my tears*. In the poem, the poet gives himself over to the greatest depression: all is lost, he is in utter shame, he dwells in darkness, and even those who are in Hell have to be happier than he is, having lost everything.

*Flow, my tears, fall from your springs!
Exiled for ever, let me mourn;
Where night's black bird her sad infamy sings,
There let me live forlorn.*

*Down vain lights, shine you no more!
No nights are dark enough for those
That in despair their last fortunes deplore.
Light doth but shame disclose.*

*Never may my woes be relieved,
Since pity is fled;
And tears and sighs and groans my weary days, my weary days
Of all joys have deprived.*

*From the highest spire of contentment
My fortune is thrown;*

*And fear and grief and pain for my deserts, for my deserts
Are my hopes, since hope is gone.*

*Hark! you shadows that in darkness dwell,
Learn to condemn light
Happy, happy they that in hell
Feel not the world's despite.*

Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757)

Sonata in G Minor, K 4 *Allegro*

Sonata in C Major, K 132 *Cantabile*

It's touching to think that Scarlatti apparently crossed himself in veneration whenever Handel's name was mentioned to him. Having competed as young men in Rome, they maintained a lifelong mutual respect that sets an example to rival musicians today. Born in the same year, they forged quite different paths. Handel cultivated a highly successful and independent career in London, whilst Scarlatti worked largely in the private spheres of the royal households in Portugal and Spain. His subsequent knighthood has led to the suggestion that he was involved in espionage – diplomacy being a not uncommon career diversification for musicians in early modern Europe.

Musically, Scarlatti is best remembered today for his 555-or-so keyboard sonatas. While many of them are dazzling firecrackers, there are many that explore the resonant qualities of the various keyboard instruments that were available to him – which even included a three-manual harpsichord. K 4 comes from Scarlatti's *Essercizi*, an enormously successful London publication that includes a preface in which the composer talks of 'an ingenious jesting with art'. Such jesting takes a back seat in K 4, which is largely a reflective two-part invention, but comes to the fore in the lyrical K 132. The latter part of each section here features crunchy chords in which the left hand underpins rhythmically spicy figures in the right. For me, this conjures up images of guitars and flutes in playful opposition post-siesta in the town square.

Alessandro Scarlatti (1660 - 1725)

'Ergiti, Amor' from *Scipione nil Spagne*

'Ergiti Amor' is from Alessandro Scarlatti's opera *Scipione nil Spagne*. Though his operas are rarely performed in full these days, some of his works such as this aria are performed as standalone pieces. Scarlatti's composition is indicative of the baroque style, using da capo aria form with melismatic coloratura, repeated text and word painting of 'ergiti' (lift). 'volo' (flight), *sosterra* (sustained) and phrases like 'senz'abassarti piu' (without coming again to earth) with ascending lines and passages that give the impression of relentless flight.

*Ergiti, amor, sui Vanni,
E prendi ardito il volo Senz'abassarti più.
Perchè con nuovi inganni Tu non ricada al suolo,
Lo sosterrà virtù.*

*Fly aloft, noble love, act boldly,
And use your wings to carry you high above the ground.
There is nothing that can hurt you,
For strong and goodly virtue will keep you safe and sound.*

George Frideric Handel (1685 - 1759)

Crudel Tiranno Amor

Crudel Tiranno Amor (1721) is a set of three da capo arias from Handel's cantata *Apollo e Dafne*. The story of Apollo e Dafne depicts the unwanted attention that Apollo lavishes upon the beautiful nymph Dafne. After attempting every means to reject the imposing and bullying god, Dafne only manages to escape Apollo's clutches by transforming herself into a laurel bush. Apollo is left both devastated and stunned by her rejections and the lengths Dafne has gone to in order to avoid his attentions.

Aria 1

*Crudel tiranno Amor,
O rendimi 'l mio ben,
O dammi libertà.
Del suo fedele ardor
Questa mercede al sen
Ingrato non si dà*

Recitativo 1

*Ma tu mandi al mio core
La speme lusinghiera,
Che promette il ritorno
Il ritorno bramato
Del caro bene amato*

Aria 2

*O dolce mia speranza,
no, non partir da me!
Per te, di lontananza
Non sento più tormento,
E vivo sol di te.
O dolce mia speranza*

Recitativo 2

*Senza te, dolce spene,
Viver in tanto duolo io non potrei;
Tu degli affanni miei tempri il dolore
E prometti che un dì con tanta, lieta
Superato il rigor del fato,
Tornerò ad abbracciar l'idolo mio!*

Aria 3

*O cara spene, del mio diletto
Il core amante, si fida di te
O spene cara!
L'amato bene,
Che torni aspetto
Fido e costante al par di me.*

Aria 1

*Amor, merciless tyrant
give back to me my dear one,
or give me back my freedom!
This reward of a loyal ardour
will not belong to an ungrateful breast.
DaCapo*

Recitativo 1

*You send to my heart a flattering hope
which promises the eagerly awaited
return of the beloved.*

Aria 2

*Oh my sweet hope,
do not depart from me!
Because of you I no longer feel
the torments of distance
and live only for you.
DaCapo*

Recitativo 2

*Without you dear hope
I could not live in such great pain
You assuaged the pains of my sorrow
and promised that one day,
once the rigour of cruel fate had passed,
I will return to embrace the one I adore!*

Aria 3

*Oh my dear hope,
let the heart of my love trust you,
oh, dear hope!
Grant that my beloved,
just like me,
will continue trusting and constant.*

About the Artists

Grace Davidson

‘Light, bright, agile and pure’ are all words that have been used to describe Grace Davidson’s voice. Yet beneath the gleaming surface of her crystalline sound and pinpoint technical accuracy lie rich reserves of emotional intelligence and expressive artistry. The British soprano's vocal and intuitive armoury enable her to project the vivid contrasts of mood at the heart of her favourite Medieval, Renaissance & Baroque repertoire with near-divine ease, especially so in the works of Hildegard von Bingen, Monteverdi, J.S. Bach, Handel and Vivaldi’ (*Apple Music*).



She performs with leading Baroque ensembles, under the batons of such figures as Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Paul McCreesh, Philippe Herreweghe, and Harry Christophers. Her discography includes over a decade of recordings, many of which feature her as a soloist: Handel’s *Jephtha*, *Acis and Galatea*, *Silente venti*, Monteverdi’s *Vespers of 1610* and *Pianto della Madonna*, *The Lutheran Masses* of J. S. Bach, and works by Purcell, Vivaldi, and other Baroque composers, to name a few. She has also recorded solo discs with music by Hildegard von Bingen and John Dowland. Her singing in Fauré’s *Requiem* (with The London Symphony Orchestra and Tenebrae under Nigel Short) was reviewed on BBC Radio 3 by Richard Morrison quite simply: ‘Grace Davidson’s *Pie Jesu* is matchless.’ Grace has also forged fruitful relationships with many contemporary and film composers such as Joe Hisaishi, Harry Gregson Williams, Hanz Zimmer, Howard Shore, and Eric Whitacre, but most notably Max Richter who chose her as the solo voice in his eight-hour piece *Sleep*, which has been performed all over the world, including Sydney Opera House and the Great Wall of China. Davidson, born in London, caught the singing bug during infancy and, after a short spell as a trainee chef, set the foundations for her career as a scholarship student at London's Royal Academy of Music. For more info please visit:

www.gracedavidsonsoprano.com



Future concerts:

23 July 2024 - The Holt Festival, Norfolk, with Christian Forshaw, Saxophonist.

<https://holtfestival.org/programme/>

Julian Perkins

Dubbed ‘The Indiana Jones of Early Music’ by BBC Radio 3, Julian Perkins is the Artistic Director of Portland Baroque Orchestra in Oregon, USA. Based in the UK, he is also Artistic Director of Cambridge Handel Opera and Sounds Baroque.

Julian was shortlisted for the 2021 Gramophone Award for his recording of Eccles’s *Semele* with the Academy of Ancient Music and Cambridge Handel Opera, and in August 2023 his fourth clavichord disc, *Handel's Attick*, was Instrumental Choice in *BBC Music Magazine*. He has been praised as both conductor and keyboard soloist for his ‘demonic intensity’ (*BBC Music Magazine* Recording of the Month), ‘fluid and natural pacing’ (*Gramophone* Editor’s Choice), conducting ‘as if every bar means the world to him’ (*Opera* Disc of the Month).

With Sounds Baroque, Julian has directed performances with such singers as Dame Emma Kirkby, Mark Padmore and Carolyn Sampson. He has directed groups ranging from the Croatian Baroque Ensemble, Deutsche Händel-Solisten, and New London Singers to the Northern Chamber Orchestra, Orchestra of Welsh National Opera, and St Paul’s Sinfonia, and worked closely with conductors including Ivor Bolton, Christopher Hogwood, Vladimir Jurowski, and Trevor Pinnock. He is directing a Classical project for the Oregon Bach Festival next week, has led over twenty Baroque projects for Southbank Sinfonia, and conducted many staged opera productions. As a keyboard player, Julian regularly performs at the Salzburg Festival and has given concerto performances with the Royal Northern Sinfonia, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, and Florilegium, among others. His prize-winning discography includes world-première recordings of over thirty works by composers ranging from Daniel Purcell to Héroïse Werner.



www.julianperkins.com



Future Concerts at Clare Hall

28 July 2024 (Sunday), 7:30 pm, Eleanor Medcalf, harp, and Susan Gritton, soprano

Harp and Voice: Art Song Reimagined. Great poetry set to music by Schubert, Mendelssohn, Fauré, Richard Strauss, Gustav Holst, and others, with solo harp interludes by Bach, Benjamin Britten, and others.



The 2024-2025 Clare Hall Concert Series: Some Highlights

19 October 2024 (Saturday), 7:30 pm: Jâms Coleman, piano, Lesley Hatfield, violin: Clara Schumann, Beethoven, Elgar, Ravel

16 February 2025 (Sunday), 7:30 pm: Raphael Wallfisch, cello, Simon Callaghan, piano: Schumann, Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin

30 March 2025 (Sunday), 7:30 pm: Bota Trio: Schubert, Purcell, Cras, Enescu

7 June 2025 (Saturday), 7:30 pm: Billy Eidi (piano), Jean-François Rouchon (baritone): Schubert *Winterreise*

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