

**Programme Notes ~ Reflection and Hope**

St James's Church, Exeter

St Margaret's Church, Topsham

**REFLECTION:****Ave Maria** (1985)

Hjálmar Ragnarsson (b. 1952)

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you!**Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus!**Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death! Amen.*

This carefully-selected and musically-curated journey through music inspired by, born from, and personifying, ideas of reflection and hope, opens with a hauntingly soulful prayer by an active composer, conductor, and teacher, hailing from the bleak and barren North-East region of his country, Iceland: a landscape he often tries to capture in his music, such as in this rendition of the traditional liturgical Latin words of the **Ave Maria** plea.

Hungry for knowledge, Ragnarsson graduated from Iceland's College of Music in Reykjavík with a bevy of certificates, having studied the piano, music theory, composition, and conducting, all with a full scholarship from an American businessman who then funded his further education in the States, via a year exploring the world of electronic music and synthesized sounds at the Institute of Sonology at Utrecht University in the Netherlands.

Widely involved in his country's cultural and political circles, Ragnarsson helped establish the Icelandic Academy of the Arts in 1998, becoming the conservatory's first rector, presiding over the fields of art, theatre, dance, design, architecture, fine arts, and, primarily, music. Fusing traditional and experimental interests and strands - ranging from the simple to the complex - Ragnarsson's musical output covers a broad gamut: from songs to orchestral scores; from choral to instrumental music; and from operas and ballets to film music and musicals: all indicative of his background, interests, and influences, as this a-cappella (unaccompanied) hymn-like setting illustrates. Sinuous in melody, fluid in rhythm, and colourfully unexpected in its harmonies, his **Ave Maria** is at once magical and mysterious in its multifarity and mood, reflecting on his homeland, life, and loves.

## **Do not stand from Requiem** (1993)

Eleanor Daley (b. 1955)

An exquisite musical cameo by Toronto-based Canadian composer, choral director, and accompanist, Eleanor Daley, this extract from her **Requiem**, although penned thirty years ago, is as effective and pertinent today as it was at its conception. Increasingly commissioned by choirs throughout the Northern hemisphere, Daley excels at creating practical compositions for specific groups of singers and voices, revealing '*her remarkable gift for melody-writing . . . and sensitive interweaving of text and music*'; all of which is no better rendered, heard and experienced than in this unaccompanied exemplar, honoured with the highest Canadian accolade: '*National Choral Award for the most outstanding choral composition of the year*'.

Often performed and recorded as a stand-alone piece of music, '**Do not stand at my grave and weep, I am not there, I do not sleep**' is the fourth of the seven movements of her '*deeply-moving*' **Requiem**. It is an unaccompanied setting of an evocative poem of mystery (from 1932), which encouragingly contemplates the cycle of life and death, this time by American botanist, florist, and poet, Mary Elizabeth Frye.

At once personal and profound, free and organic, and cumulatively unique, it is consistently soothing in both its sonorities and substance:

*'warmly expressive and hopeful,  
it is a rich harmonic tapestry of seamless legato melodic lines'.*

## **A day may come** (2025)

Debbie Wiseman (b. 1963)

Further sumptuous and deep musical musings pervade this most recent of works by internationally-renowned, multi-award-festooned, popular teacher, conductor, and Classic FM's composer-in-residence, regularly patronised by our royalty, Debbie Wiseman. She is known as much for her plethora of striking scores for television shows and films (from Stephen Fry's revitalising of Oscar Wilde to Tudor-period Thomas Cromwell in *Wolf Hall*) as for her choral cameos, which the '*poignant, moving, and striking*' **A day may come** (commissioned by Classic FM) best elucidates.

A fresh anthem '*of great beauty, tenderness, and emotion*' crafted for the national celebrations of *VE Day 80*, with words of sacrifice, remembrance, hope, and learning from the past, by contemporary Welsh journalist, poet and librettist, Grahame Clive Davies (b. 1964) - former assistant private secretary to Charles, Prince of Wales - it was first performed by the unsurpassable, 'best of British', a-cappella vocal group, *Voces8*, who recorded its première at the legendary Abbey Road Studios.

**Pax vobiscum**, D. 551b (1817 - 1828)

*Peace be with you, oh soul pure as an angel!  
In the fresh flowering of youth,  
the beam of death has gathered you in,  
so that it could marry you to pure light,  
the light which already suffused you,  
and from which  
your spirit sang to us in sacred tones;  
the light that woke you up,  
led you, and set you ablaze;  
that light that derives from God alone!*

*Oh, transfigured friend,  
look down on our tears,  
forgive the pain in our weak human breasts,  
it is we who have been robbed and suffered!  
You are soaring, liberated,  
to the spheres where you belong.*

Franz Peter Schubert (1797 - 1828)

*For your many roses, this earthly life  
has rewarded you with sharp thorns,  
a long illness and an early grave –  
up there all your chains will drop off!*

*And what you have left behind for us  
as our inheritance:  
the work of passionate love, intense strength,  
sacred truth, magnificent and untiring,  
we want to hold tight, deep in our souls.*

*What you have become for art,  
for those who love you,  
is manifest in your heavenly chords.  
When we follow your sweet sounds,  
we shall joyfully encounter you again!*

Schubert's **Pax vobiscum** is a tripartite prayer reflecting on the peace of God, as found in nature, evening skies, and the promise of heaven. Inspired by themes of divine blessing and resurrection - with lyrics describing peace descending like mist, blooming with spring, and comforting sufferers with the combined powers of faith, hope, and love - Schubert's setting is characteristically profoundly eloquent and refined.

Imbued with tranquility, **Pax vobiscum** was the only one of Schubert's songs performed at his Viennese funeral in the Josef Kirche on 21st November 1828. For this occasion - as also in this concert of music inspired by, and celebrating, friendship, unity, and rumination - its words were rewritten by its original poet, Schubert's closest friend, Swedish-German, Franz von Schober (1796-1882); and its music re-arranged by Schubert's trusted musical companion, fellow Austrian composer and director of music at St Stephen's Cathedral, Johann Baptist Gängbacher (1778-1844) for a chamber choir of his ardent companions to sing beside his open coffin. As throughout his life, Schubert remained inextricably entwined with his friends and their shared loves.

Ever ruminating on his friends, family, and surroundings, Schubert wrote this tender Austrian chorale as a concentrated homage: an intense, unaccompanied choral lament on life, love and death in music for his numerous followers:

*'embroidered with many expressive elements of mourning:  
elegiac . . . transcendent . . . and ever communicative' . . .*

*Isabella Farleigh ~ cello*

*Peter Adcock ~ piano*

**Du bist die Ruh**, D. 776 (1826)

Franz Peter Schubert (1797 - 1828)

arr. David Popper (1843 - 1913)

*You are repose and gentle peace; you are longing and what stills it.*

*Full of joy and grief, I consecrate to you my eyes and my heart as a dwelling place.*

*Come in to me and softly close the gate behind you!*

*Drive all other grief from my breast; let my heart be full of your joy!*

*The temple of my eyes is lit by your radiance alone; oh fill it wholly!*

Schubert's **Du bist die Ruh** is a deeply spiritual and devotional lovesong which burgeoned from a delicate poem by the highly-respected Romantic-German poet, Friedrich Rückert (1788-1866), expressing love as a sacred dwelling place for joy. Replacing all sorrow, love is invited to enter and fill the singer's heart and eyes with its presence; all sublimely reflected and magnified in Schubert's most memorable music.

Exploring themes of enduring love and solace, in gently reassuring strophic form, its tender, complementary piano writing and subtle dynamic waves peacefully auralate meditative qualities and deep innate human longing for the haven of enduring love.

This sublime song was arranged with subtle sensitivity by the virtuoso cellist and musician, David Popper, as an eternally-popular version for cello (taking the rôle of the singer in Schubert's original) and piano, as equal duo partners, optimising its inherent serenity throughout '*its gentle yet powerful emotional journey from yearning to fulfilment, and its unique blend of Western Romanticism with Eastern spiritual calm*'.

## CELESTIAL WONDERS:

**Chor der Engel**, D. 440 (1816)

Franz Peter Schubert (1797 - 1828)

*Choir of Angels*

*Christ is risen; joy to the mortal;*

*joy to all who are saved from corrupting, insidious, inherited sins!!*

From the famous play, **Faust**, by the pre-eminent German writer, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), this elegantly-hewn choral gem was initially carved as an a-cappella setting for mixed chorus (the traditional soprano - alto - tenor - bass choral line-up), but has been arranged specifically for this concert's performers by their director - even entwining a special lyrical strand for solo cello - amplifying its ponderous and soulful qualities, and its potent heavenly and impassioned properties.

Concise and condensed, finely-constructed in clearly-defined and distinct phrases (sentence-like musical utterances), it is cast in the magisterially-sturdy key of c minor, richly spiced with Schubert's hallmark additional chromaticisms (to highlight and harmonically colour fundamental words, moments, and ideas); ultimately resolving optimistically with a '*tierce de picardie*' (following the tradition found in much of the minor-key music by his greatest inspiration, Johann Sebastian Bach) in its parallel of C major (a key chosen for its inherent celebratory triumph). Schubert has also periodically woven in spacious rests of silence, both to ponder on the music and words just sung as well as to prepare for what is yet to come in this angelic chorus.

**Lux aeterna** from **Sanctum** (2014)

Sarah Quartel (b. 1982)

*May eternal light shine upon them, O Lord, with your saints, because you are merciful!*

Musically setting a plangent cry from the Catholic Requiem Mass for the Dead, asking for perpetual light, peace and rest for the departed, Sarah Quartel's **Sanctum** is scored solely for the highest-pitched voices (sopranos and altos) to represent radiant ethereal luminosity. One of Canada's most globally-celebrated contemporary choral composers, Quartel rejoices in numerous commissions, concerts, and streaming of her music from the Swingles and the Gesualdo Six to the National Youth and Stay-at-Home Choirs; from historic Canterbury Cathedral to the remote Church of the Rock in Helsinki. Raised as a chorister, Quartel is influenced by the life-changing relationships that often occur through choral singing. Known for her fresh, exciting, and idiomatically choir-centric compositions, she aims to enliven and unite, connect and bind singer to singer; ensemble to conductor; and composer and performer to audience.

Educator and mentor, Quartel has been described as '*a brilliant composer and clinician who sees the world, and singers, more deeply than most. Her pieces have become many choirs' favourites, perhaps because her music is a reflection of herself, emitting an energy that draws people in. Sarah has every eye shining with a new sparkle . . . and her works typically embrace sweeping, charming melodies supported by a fresh harmonic language,*' as demonstrated in this upper-voice paradigm.

Concluding her tetralogy **Sanctum** of four excerpts of the Requiem liturgy (*Requiem aeternam - Kyrie - Agnus Dei - Lux aeterna*), **Lux aeterna** is the most captivating and serene of her unaccompanied vocal-music reflections: '*the calm after the storm*'. Inspired by the landscape of the west coast of Canada, each movement depicts an aspect of Vancouver Island, British Columbia (the water; mountains; wind; and sky, respectively); exploring landscape as a place of healing and sanctuary. '*The combined effect is Quartel's most atmospheric and dramatic writing to date*'.

## Give me your stars (2025)

Lucy Walker (b. 1998)

Another highly-flavoured work by a highly-revered active musician (currently the prestigious composer-in-residence at Clare Hall, Cambridge; passionate about all aspects of music and music-making), **Give me your stars** emanates an astral vision. *'Full of light, and beautifully crafted . . . accessible and inclusive'* of a vast, wondrous universe, it sets Sara Teasdale's poem about discovering stars and celestial light in loved ones, in a gloriously appealing and satisfying manner.

Walker's works have been championed by choirs small and large, national and international, from England to America, and frequently programmed and broadcast: testament to their beauty and merit; style and sensibility.

Written specially for, and dedicated to, the inspirational vocal octet, Voces 8, **Give me your stars** '*explores the diverse beauty of music inspired by the heavens, human connection, and the places we call home . . . capturing the delicate balance between celestial wonder and the deep, personal connections that make us human*'. Following - and intertwining eclectic musical elements from - the choral traditions of the Spanish Renaissance genius, Tomás Luis de Vittoria; modern American master, Eric Whitacre; Scandinavian maestro, Ola Gjeilo; as well as folk and jazz genres, Walker has amalgamated a cross-generational, trans-global musical vocabulary in her unique choralscape that manages to resonate universally with singers and listeners - from the cosmos to the intimate:

*'you are my deepening skies,  
give me your stars to hold!'*

## Alleluia! (1940)

Randall Thompson (1899 - 1984)

To round off the first half of this concert, inextricably weaving together its textually- and musically-substantive themes of reflection and hope - as both progenitors and progeny of music - Thompson's acclaimed **Alleluia** expresses and reflects earthly and celestial wonders. Composed in less than a week in 1940, in a creative whirlwind, this '*great hit*' was premièred that July at the hallowed Tanglewood music festival.

An American composer, most notable for his choral output and tuition (particularly of his most successful pupil, Leonard Bernstein) - at his country's top Curtis Institute of Music and Harvard University - Thompson's vast influence on American choral music was regularly recognised and honoured from the Universities of Pennsylvania to Yale.

A practical, unaccompanied SATB (soprano - alto - tenor - bass) chorus, **Alleluia** was commissioned by Serge Koussevitzky, director of the annual, international Tanglewood Festival, as: '*a fanfare for voices to be performed at the opening of the new Berkshire Music Center*'. Unexpectedly, Thompson chose a quiet, introspective approach as most apposite, given the ongoing Second World War across the Atlantic, and the recent fall of France to the Nazis, as depicted by its incessantly-relentless, minimalist repetition (over 70 times across all four voice parts) of the sole word, '*alleluia!*' ('God be praised!'); concluding with one unanimous choral '*amen*' ('so be it!').

A study in rhythm, meter and declamation - in all combinations of the four standard choral vocal parts - it is, nevertheless, as Thompson explained: '*a very slow, sad piece . . . Beginning raptly and tenderly, it moves through dark and anxious moments before breaking through to cascades of 'alleluias', like the swooping and soaring of larks . . . going through many moods before ending with a quiet 'amen' . . . The word 'Alleluia' has so many possible interpretations, but here it is comparable to the Book of Job: 'The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!'*'

~ interval ~

## LOVE AND HOPE:

**It's a sin to tell a lie**

Garon Heslop (fl.)

With both words and music written by ExeVox tenor, Garon Heslop, this unaccompanied choral work is at once beguiling and feisty; striking and stylish.

The tale begins with the sopranos; their fellow singers joining in supportive agreement, enriched with some jazz-infused harmonic inflections and deft melodic dialogue. Halfway through, a slick modulation (change of key and mood) increases the music's temperature, energy, and momentum, briefly shifting the melody from the sopranos to the altos and tenors in earnest discourse., before the sopranos regain musical and melodic control, leaping around dramatically above the lower voices' driving harmonies:

*'If you break my heart I'll die,  
so be sure it's true when you say, "I love you!"  
It's a sin to tell a lie!'*

## Hope is the thing with feathers

from **The lost birds** (2018-2022)

Christopher Tin (b. 1976)

Another multi-award-holding, contemporary, American composer of wide-reaching music - most notably soundtracks for television shows, films, and video games - Tin's background and education is similarly international: with parents from Hong Kong; and scholarship degrees from both Stanford and Oxford Universities, and London's Royal College of Music, in English literature, art history, film studies, and music, achieving the highest marks in composition. He skilfully fused all these disciplines in his subsequent musical work, such as this exemplary extract from his fourth recorded album, **The lost birds: an extinction elegy**: '*a musical memorial to bird species driven to extinction by humankind and a celebration of their beauty, while also presenting a warning about humanity's own tenuous existence on the planet . . . consisting of twelve movements, ten of which use texts by poets Emily Dickinson, Sara Teasdale, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Cristina Rossetti . . . Funded once again via Kickstarter, it became the highest funded classical music project on this platform*'.

**The lost birds** album headlines the perennially-popular British ensemble Voces8, and was recorded at their centre (St Anne and St Agnes Church, near St Paul's Cathedral in the City of London), having been premièred virtually as part of their '*Live from London*' series in October 2022. Its twelfth and final movement, **Hope is the thing with feathers**, is a luscious and luxuriant unaccompanied choral setting of American poet, Emily Dickinson's eponymous poignant poem: '*meditating on nature's fragility, humanity's impact on extinction, and enduring hope . . . a moving elegy for vanishing wildlife . . . a lament for destruction and a beacon of hope*'. It re-imagines a melody and other musical ideas from Tin's former work for string orchestra, entitled **Flocks a mile wide**, composed for a documentary (filmed 2000-2012), called **The lost bird project**.

*'Its elegiac tone lends itself to occasions of honoring and remembrance; but deep within its downy melodic layers beats a warm heart of hope, like the song of a small bird in a storm'.*

## Let my love be heard! (2014)

Jake Runestad (b. 1986)

Fellow well-patronised, honour-rich, American composer, Runestad, has also composed music for an impressive panoply of musical genres and ensembles; but has achieved greatest acclaim for his choral crafting, delving into, and drawing on, themes of reflection, hope, and love, as manifested in this mini masterpiece, which was originally written for Choral Arts Northwest: a Seattle-based organisation, whose

noble mission is 'to inspire, educate, and enrich our community through the transformational power of choral music . . . seeking to foster a world that is just and empathetic'.

'One of the best of the younger American composers . . . of highly imaginative . . . impactful . . . stirring and uplifting music', Runestad was particularly inspired to compose this optimistic paean by numerous social atrocities throughout the world - which alarmingly continue to multiply - encouraging solidarity and hope, peace and reconciliation through music and its unparalleled power to heal and unite across boundaries.

His music carries the words of **A Prayer** by Alfred Noyes (Oxford- and Yale-educated English poet, 1880-1958):

'Angels, where you soar up to God's own light,  
Take my own lost bird on your hearts tonight . . .  
Let my love be heard whispering in your wings!'

**Let my love be heard** ingeniously counter-balances celebration and grief in its musical fabric, 'becoming a powerful anthem of solidarity and hope after tragedy. Using rich textures, shifting meters, and soaring melodies to express collective sorrow, love, and resilience . . . from joyful rhythmic exultation . . . through a meditative, reverent section with soaring melodies and lush harmonies, reflecting the poem's lament . . . to its conclusion, where its opening themes reappear, building in intensity as a hopeful, communal expression of love and unity . . . to bring comfort during times of loss and struggle'.

In 2015, its composer wrote: 'I am honored that this piece, **Let My Love Be Heard**, has helped to provide hope in the darkness of our world . . . it has taken on new life in light of the atrocities in Paris and Lebanon . . . shared in memory of those whose lives were lost, and as a plea for peace . . . a powerful outpouring of grief, but also a glimmer of light'.

**Let's do it, let's fall in love!** (1928)

Cole Porter (1891-1964)

An oft-requested choir - and composer - favourite is Cole Porter's finger-clicking, up-beat, lovesong, '**Let's do it!**'. Veritably international (from Spain to both Americas via Lithuania and Holland), it is a pot-pourri song (talking of birds, marine life, insects, centipedes, and mammals) of love and hope, as championed in this zappy arrangement for unaccompanied choir concocted by David Blackwell in 1995, where each voice part - and singer - regularly gets a chance to '*fall in love*' with its main musical motifs.

Written in 1928, to reintroduce Porter's music to New York's musical scene ('elevating him into the upper echelon of Broadway songwriters'), this now-classic number first appeared in the musical, **Paris**, and was so popular that Porter re-used it in the 1933 Hollywood movie, **Grand Slam**, as well as his film, **Can-Can**, in 1960. Suggestive, droll, and full of double entendres and quirky images, its infectious tune and unstoppable propulsion render it both perennially appealing and delectably singable!

One of the pre-eminent American songwriters of the first half of the last century, Yale-educated Porter was renowned for his cutting-edge wit, urbanity, and modernity. Uniquely fusing his own words and music together, 'Let's do it!' was designed to lift everyone's spirits, with endless enduring success.

Hedonistic and ever in love, Porter captures here the magic and mystery of falling in love with adept flair and many a melodic hook (aural ear-worms which are hard to forget). Initially deemed rather risqué, it has become a standard beloved of artists from Ella Fitzgerald, Frank Sinatra, and Oscar Peterson to Harry Connick Jr, Diana Krall, and the modern American a-cappella vocal quintet, Pentatonix, as well as prominently featuring in such films as Woody Allen's 2011 **Midnight in Paris**:

*'Birds do it, bees do it, even educated fleas do it;  
let's do it, let's fall in love!'*

*Isabella Farleigh ~ cello*  
*Peter Adcock ~ piano*

**2 Hungarian dances** (1869-1881)

*Johannes Brahms (1833 - 1897)*  
*arr. C. Alfredo Piatti (1822 - 1901)*

Created by arch-German Romantic-epoch composer, Brahms, and later adapted by Italian cellist and composer, Piatti, this pair of scintillating and evocative Hungarian dances, epitomise the quintessential spirit of their country of origin, initial genre, and their handlers' individual musical identities with both stylish flair and aplomb.

Piatti was renowned for transcribing the most favoured and enjoyed music of his time, including all 21 of Brahms's **Hungarian Dances** (originally destined for piano duet: four hands at one piano). Their duo nature - two equal friends in lively conversation and dance - is masterfully retained and extended in Piatti's versions, which have been chosen for this concert, mirroring Piatti's close friendship and frequent chamber-music-making collaboration with Brahms. Capturing invigorating, Hungarian-gypsy-style music, Brahms's originals are mesmerically rhythmic and tuneful; and were an instant success for both audiences and amateur and professional performers.

Brahms greatly approved of Piatti's '*most sensitive refinement*' of his dances, reinforcing them as '*genuine pieces of chamber music . . . sparkling and plaintive . . . with beautiful Hungarian folk lilts . . . from soaring jubilation to mournful melancholy*', as these two specially-selected duos exemplify: the two which Brahms and Piatti most often performed together.

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## ADIEU:

**The parting glass** (2018)

Sarah Quartel (b. 1982)

**The parting glass** is a traditional Scottish valediction of sweet farewell, fond remembrance, and fervid longing for return at the end of a social gathering (second only to Robbie Burns's ubiquitous **Auld lang syne**, dating from 1788). Sarah Quartel's witty and slick a-cappella choral arrangement features close barbershop-style harmonies; idiomatic Scotch-snap (reverse-dotted / short-long) rhythms; and appropriately effective interjections from each vocal part. She prepared it for her good friend and poet, Matt Jones, who served with the Canadian Military in Afghanistan in 2010-2011. His initial deployment and eventual safe return inspired her pertinent setting in both its spirit, sentiment, and substance.

Noted for its '*gentle strength and confidence . . . warm, resonant vocal landscape . . . and emotional depth and flow*', **The parting glass** often appears as an encore - even championed by the legendary **Swingles** - concluding with two utterances of its reassuring, comforting, and hopeful refrain:

*'goodnight and joy be with you all!'*

**I'll be there** (1970/2025)

The Jackson 5,  
arr. Blake Morgan (b. 1991)

'*Free and speech-like*', is how Voces8 tenor, American-born and -trained Blake Morgan, directs the style of this following arrangement of a Jackson 5 (five members of the African-American Jackson family) classic. So much loved, both at home and abroad, it was immortalised in 2011 in the Grammy Hall of Fame (which preserves musical recordings of lasting qualitative and historical cultural significance). Written by a clutch of the top American songwriters of the day, '*this achingly tender ballade*' first appeared in August 1970 on the Jackson 5's third album as their most successful single ever released, and remained a '*breathtaking, moment-making*' number-1 hit in the United States for over 5 weeks, confirming their quality and rocketing their careers. It later

established and similarly advanced the careers of such singer-songwriters as Mariah Carey; and has been requested a record number of times across all media platforms.

As Mariah Carey made it her own (in her '*astonishingly soulful rendition*'), so Blake Morgan has dug deep and shed new iridescent light on its character, harmonies and textures, enriching and enhancing all of its features in his sophisticated re-imagining for supergroups Voces8 and The Ringmasters (the most popular Swedish barbershop quartet). With his hallmark creativity, Morgan has transformed the original into a new choral classic with sensitive, stylish, and multi-coloured harmonies; and familial interactions of the vocal parts - ably and aptly responding to Estonian choral composer, Arvo Pärt's assertion that:

*'the most sensitive musical instrument is the human soul.*

*The next is the human voice' -*

*'just call my name and I'll be there!*

**Rest** (2008)

Ken Burton (b. 1970)

And so to another unaccompanied choral gem which beautifully shines the musical spotlight on peaceful endings, choral calm, and vocal repose, by another all-round modern musician, but this time a British choral conductor, composer, and arranger, Ken Burton, publicly best-known on countless episodes of BBC's Songs of Praise.

A delicate, introspective choral chorale, **Rest** sets biblical verses from the gospel according to St Matthew - '*Come unto Him all ye that labour and He will give you rest*' - with graceful sensitivity and understanding. The resultant sound world (the beauteous effects of closely-combined voices without instrumental support) is both emotive and evocative; warm and lyrical; soothing and spiritual; and contemplative and comforting. Listen for the inner (alto and tenor) and lower (bass) voices adding reflective echoes and responses to its fundamentally soprano-driven melodic focus; and the 5 sustained notes from a soprano soloist at the end, as if maternally inviting rest.

**Slumber, my darling** (1862/2023)

Stephen Foster (1826 - 1864)  
arr. Blake Morgan (fl.)

Following this invitation to slumber after a long day, rich in music and reflection, comes **Slumber, my darling** by Stephen Foster, '*the father of American music*'. A prolific producer of folk-like and parlour songs for all to sing, join in with, recall, and enjoy,

Foster was the composer of such well-known numbers as **Camptown races, Oh, Susanna!**, and **Slumber, my darling**, all still sung throughout the world to this day, though originally used in minstrel shows the length and breadth of the country. He also wrote volumes of hymns for all to sing by ear; parlour songs for families and friends readily to perform at home; and playable arrangements of classical favourites.

Written during the beginning of the American Civil War (1861-1865, between the Union - the ultimate victors - in the North, and the Confederacy in the South), its theme and music (unlike much of his other 'lighter' musical fare) are dark, and its subtext apparent: using the image of a loving mother singing her child to sleep as a metaphor for the finality of war and sacrifice.

Morgan recast and re-explored the song and its messages and meaning with a thoroughly modern stance, exploring a broader palette of vocal timbres and hues, further enriched by his own deeply-personal Proustian connection. The result is a most alluring and charming lullaby which *'endeavours to capture the intimacy and reassurance of the maternal connection while also infusing a touch of the murky dreamland through which a child may venture when sleep finally overtakes them. It is dedicated to my sister Mariah and her son (my nephew) Flynn on his first birthday'*.

It glows and grows in sound and feeling as it spins a sonic dreamworld, which is at once hushed (as if whispered breathily) and distant; compassionate and warm-hearted; caring and calming; and tender and encouraging.

~

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## ENCORE:

**Follow me down to Carlow!** (1915)

trad. Irish, arr. Percy Fletcher

Arranged by all-round London-based musician, Percy Fletcher (1879-1932) in 1915 - and not to be confused with '*Follow me up to Carlow!!* - **Follow me down to Carlow!** (a county town in SE Ireland, not far from Dublin) is a metaphor for friendship and memory; feelings and nostalgia; love and reflection:

*'for sure you can hear the music call . . .  
as finch and thrush and blackbird sing!'*

A traditional Irish folk ballade set to a jaunty, upbeat hornpipe dance, it stimulates rhythmic foot-tapping and plants tuneful earworms for you all to take home as thoughtful memories of ExeVox's musical celebration of love and reflection.

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**ExeVox** ~ chamber choir

[www.exevox.org.uk](http://www.exevox.org.uk)

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**Isabella Farleigh** ~ cellist

[www.isabellafarleighcello.com](http://www.isabellafarleighcello.com)

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**Peter Adcock** ~ musical director *and* pianist

[www.peteradcock.co.uk](http://www.peteradcock.co.uk)

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