

## Christopher Smart's *Jubilate Agno*

For *Rejoice in the Lamb*, Britten plundered a rich source of lyrics in Smart's extraordinary poem. The surviving manuscript comprises over 1,200 lines.

Christopher (Kit) Smart (1722-1771) spent years of his life incarcerated in lunatic asylums and died in a debtor's prison. Reports vary as to the extent and reality of his insanity. It's said his father in law bore him a grudge and had him committed. Letters from friends refer to him launching into loud and public prayer whenever the urge took him: Dr Johnson defended him, saying that this presented no danger to anyone else.

*Jubilate Agno* was written whilst Smart was in St Luke's Hospital for Lunatics, Bethnal Green. The form is similar to a psalm or Hebrew Antiphon, with sections of lines starting "Let..." matched by sections starting "For...". The full text is sacred in approach, praising God and expressing Smart's belief that God is revealed in every living thing. References to more prosaic subjects create unexpected diversions, including lists from newspaper obituaries of people with animal names, such as "Mr Pigg, of Downham in Norfolk".

While confined, Smart may only have had access to a handful of books, including the Bible and volumes on pharmacy and plants. This might explain the amazing and erudite references he makes to obscure biblical characters. He clearly had vast and detailed knowledge of the natural world, which he deploys expansively to dramatise his exhortations to God and his fellow men.

Britten picked some of Smart's most accessible and celebratory text for *Rejoice in the Lamb*: the chamois and satyr you'll hear mentioned are positively commonplace compared to obscure examples like "platycerotes" and "scolopendra."

The soprano solo tells of Smart's cat Jeoffry who was with him in his confinement. It goes into great and loving detail about the cat's habits. Later, Britten picks out the line "For H is a spirit" for the baritone solo: in the poem, this is part of an alphabetical list of observations running from A to Z twice.

Frank Key describes Smart's style as "encyclopaedic... [with a] passion for listing and enumerating." He adds, "The modern reader cannot hope to grasp every reference and allusion... but Smart's language is exact and exquisite, with a musicality that becomes hypnotic." It's easy to see why Britten found the text so satisfying as an inspiration for his dramatic and exuberant score.

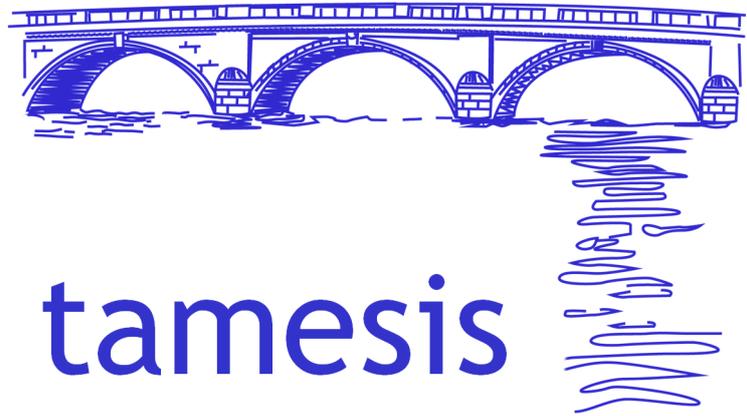
CAH, March 2014

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# tamesis chamber choir

director - Louise Rapple

organist - Simon Dinsdale

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

presents the first concert  
in the 2014 season  
"Flora and Fauna"

## Rejoice in the Lamb

Saturday 15th March 2014

7:30 pm

Greyfriars Church, Reading





## Tamesis Chamber Choir

### Sopranos

Miranda Bradshaw  
Clare Garner  
Katie Johnston  
Julie Kench  
Jenny Lucas  
Anne Owen  
Tania Pratt  
Charlie Watson  
Tamsyn Wilson

### Altos

Alison Evans  
Sarah Finch  
Marion Harris  
Charlie Hobson  
Elysia Roberts  
Alison Wilkins

### Tenors

Tim Beavan  
Nick Brown  
Simon Eastwood  
Laurence Hicks  
Jude Watts

### Basses

James Allen  
Andy Button  
John Cobb  
Ed Hobson  
Patrick Moore

**Tamesis Chamber Choir** aims to offer something different from other choirs in the area. We are a high-standard, fun chamber choir performing several concerts per year. We re-audition formally each September but do sometimes have vacancies during the year, so if you are interested in singing with us, contact Louise on 0118 931 4279 or email [lourap@gmail.com](mailto:lourap@gmail.com).

### Our Christmas CD for Sue Ryder

Sue Ryder is a national charity that is passionate about giving people the care they want. They have 13 care centres across the UK providing compassionate care and support for people with palliative, long-term and end of life needs. Locally, they operate the Duchess of Kent Hospice and Nettlebed Hospice. Many of us will know people who have had the benefit of their care.

In October last year, Louise was amazed and proud to be named Sue Ryder's Creative Woman of the Year in a fabulous award ceremony at the Madejski Hotel.

Louise was nominated for the award by a member of Tamesis for the work she does with Tamesis, Shiplake Community Choir and choral singing in general. By way of giving something back to the charity, next month Tamesis will be recording our third CD, a CD of Christmas music, with a significant portion of the proceeds from each CD going towards the wonderful work Sue Ryder does in our community and nationwide.



**Louise** began learning piano from six and sang in a Church choir from seven. She read Music and French at Reading University, specialising in performance. She studied conducting at the Conservatoire de Pau in southern France during her year abroad, and returned to direct the Reading University Singers for two years.

Having graduated, Louise became Organist and Choir Director at St John's Church in Crowthorne, later moving to the same position at Christ Church, Reading where she spent five happy years with a lovely choir. She founded Tamesis in 2003 and could not be happier with the way the choir has turned out! She also directs Tamesis Cathedral Singers, an occasional choir which sings Cathedral Evensongs twice a year. She is in demand locally as a deputy conductor, and enjoys the challenge of stepping in when other choir directors are indisposed; she regularly conducts Thames Valley Gay Chorus, Goring Chamber Choir and the Twyford Singers.

Louise works full-time at Shiplake College, teaching piano, playing the organ and administrating all sorts of things. As part of her work there she runs the College Chamber Choir and Shiplake Community Choir, a choir for singers of all ages and abilities, singing a mainly popular repertoire.

### Forthcoming events

Visit [www.tamesis.org](http://www.tamesis.org) for latest news and tickets

Saturday 5th April 2014  
Reading Town Hall  
"The Armed Man"

We are very pleased to be involved in this important concert, in the year which marks the centenary of the start of the First World War. Tamesis will join local choirs South Chiltern Choral Society, Reading Festival Chorus and A440 Choir, along with Ascot Brass, for the full performance of this popular work.

Saturday 21st June 2014  
St Laurence's Church, Reading  
"Sumer is icumen in"

Our second concert in the 2014 **Flora and Fauna** season will feature Reading's most famous piece of music, *Sumer is icumen in*, the earliest transcription of music ever found, which was discovered at Reading Abbey. We will also be performing Horowitz's ever-popular *Captain Noah and his Floating Zoo*, a selection of folk songs, a medley from Lloyd Webber's acclaimed musical *Cats!* and much more.

## Programme

### Hear my prayer

Felix Mendelssohn  
(1809–1847)

The beautiful words of *Hear my Prayer*, including its iconic solo *O for the wings of a dove* were written by librettist William Bartholomew (1793-1867), who actually made his living as a chemist, but is now remembered more for his libretti. He also collaborated with Mendelssohn on *Elijah*. The text of *Hear my Prayer* is drawn from the opening verses of Psalm 55. The piece was written in 1844, but only became globally famous in 1927, when the Gramophone Company (the parent company of HMV) made a recording of it at the Temple Church in London, with choirboy Ernest Lough singing the soprano solo. Lough was the very first celebrity choirboy, and his recording, which is still available on CD, has sold over six million copies. It is available on youtube if you fancy a listen!

### Go, lovely rose

Eric Thiman  
(1900–1975)

Eric Thiman is an English composer born in Kent. Largely self-taught, he none the less graduated to the position of Professor of Harmony at the Royal Academy of Music and Dean of the Faculty of Music at the University of London. He was a prolific composer of small-scale works, and is chiefly remembered for his choral pieces, some of which are still regularly performed today. The lyrics of *Go, lovely rose* are by Edmund Waller (1606-1687), an English poet and politician whose work has, these days, rather lost its popularity although it was admired to excess during his lifetime.

### With a lily in your hand

Eric Whitacre  
(1970– )

*With a lily in your hand* is the third piece from Whitacre's set of *Three Flower Songs*. The first piece, his arrangement of *Go, lovely rose*, was Whitacre's first-ever performed piece, and it went down so well that he decided to write two others to make a set. *With a lily in your hand* takes a small piece of material from *Go, lovely rose* and creates a joyous, life-affirming piece. The words are by the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca (1898-1936). Whitacre says of the piece, "Water and Fire. If the performance of this piece connects these contrasting elemental ideas, its success is guaranteed". Most of the piece is in the fire category, but hopefully you'll notice the slower, more fluid water sections. Listen out for the butterflies fluttering through the rippling water halfway through the piece.

LER, March 2014

### A big thank you

to our organist, Simon Dinsdale,  
and to the authorities here at  
Greyfriars for the use of this lovely  
Church and for making us so welcome.

### Sicut Cervus

Palestrina

A selection of madrigals:

All creatures now

Bennet

Dainty fine bird

Gibbons

Sweet Suffolk owl

Vautor

Flora gave me fairest flowers

Wilbye

### Lay a garland

Pearsall

### Interlude

### Fleur Jetée

Fauré

and

### Les Roses d'Ispahan

Fauré

Soprano: Julie Kench

Piano: Alison Wilkins

### Rejoice in the Lamb

Britten

Soprano: Tamsyn Wilson

Alto: Elysia Roberts

Tenor: Jude Watts

Bass: John Cobb

### Interval

### Les Chansons des Roses

Lauridsen

### Interlude

### La Primavera from *The Four Seasons*

Vivaldi

1. Giunt'è la Primavera

2. Il capraro che dorme

3. Danza pastorale

Organ: Simon Dinsdale

### Hear my prayer

Mendelssohn

Soprano: Julie Kench

### Go, lovely rose

Thiman

### With a lily in your hand

Whitacre

## Notes on the programme

### Sicut Cervus Giovanni Perluigi da Palestrina (c. 1525–1594)

*Sicut Cervus* takes as its text the first verse of Psalm 42: 'As the deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God'. One of Palestrina's best-known motets, it embodies the beauty and dignity for which Palestrina's music is known. The compositional style is typical Palestrina, each phrase having its own section made up of a melodic theme passing from one voice part to another, with all these individual vocal lines coming together to form a seamless whole.

### A selection of madrigals

Our four madrigalists this evening were all composers of the English Madrigal School, a brief but intense flowering of the musical madrigal in England, around the turn of the 17th century. Alfonso Ferrabosco was an Italian musician who worked in Queen Elizabeth I's court in the 1560s and 1570s. Madrigals were already popular in Italy by this time, and the impetus for the English Madrigal School came both from Ferrabosco and from the growing popularity of the sonnet, which lent itself well to the madrigal style. Thomas Morley, Thomas Weelkes and John Wilbye were the most influential composers of madrigals of the time, although Orlando Gibbons and William Byrd both flirted with the form.

### All creatures now John Bennet (c. 1575–after 1614)

*All creatures now* is Bennet's best-known composition. It was included in *The Triumph of Oriana*, a compilation of English madrigals put together by Thomas Morley, another well-known madrigalist, in 1601. Oriana was a word often used to refer to Queen Elizabeth I, and all the madrigals in the collection had to end with the couplet "Then sang the Shepherds and Nymphs of Diana: long live fair Oriana". This madrigal is lively and catchy—listen out for the running quavers describing how the "birds do hover over her".

### Dainty fine bird Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625)

Gibbons' most famous madrigal is *The silver swan*, which would of course have fitted with our Flora and Fauna theme, but I thought it might be interesting to hear one of his lesser-known compositions. In fact, *Dainty fine bird* is not dissimilar to *The silver swan*, being something of a lament for a caged bird. Like *The silver swan*, *Dainty fine bird* finishes with an aphorism; having pointed out how similar the caged bird is to himself, also in thrall to a lady, the author ends: 'Only thus we differ, thou and I, Thou liv'st singing, but I sing and die'.

### Sweet Suffolk owl Thomas Vautor (c. 1580–?)

Along with *Mother, I will have a husband*, this is one of Vautor's best-known works. He was in musical service in the early 17th century, most notably to the Duke of Buckingham, and received his Bachelors of Music from Oxford University in 1616. *Sweet Suffolk Owl* is full of word-painting—not least in the 'te whit, te whoo' refrain that returns throughout the piece. Listen also for the quavers on 'thy note so freely rolls' and the 'dirge for dying souls' (namely mice!) at the end.

### Flora gave me fairest flowers John Wilbye (1574–1638)

Wilbye was the most prolific of all the English madrigalists—he wrote at least 64 madrigals. *Flora gave me fairest flowers* is a cheerful and straightforward piece, displaying Wilbye's skill in vocal orchestration: the five parts are not kept in constant play but rather Wilbye writes for ever-changing smaller groups within the ensemble.

### Lay a garland Robert Lucas de Pearsall (1795–1856)

In 1837 the Bristol Madrigal Society was founded, to promote madrigal singing in the city. The society is still going strong today, as Bristol Chamber Choir. *All creatures now* and *Flora gave me fairest flowers* were both performed at the inaugural meeting of the society, and among its first members was Robert Pearsall, who was born in Bristol. Opinion is divided as to whether *Lay a Garland* is a part song or a madrigal; certainly it was written over 200 years after Gibbons was lamenting the demise of the English madrigal, but it was composed as a means of reviving the madrigal era in Pearsall's unique pastiche style. Pearsall was mainly self-taught, making this sublime piece all the more remarkable.

### Rejoice in the Lamb Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Britten's *Rejoice in the Lamb* is set to words by Christopher Smart. The original poem, *Jubilate Agno* (Latin for 'Rejoice in the Lamb'), is very much longer than Britten's cantata; Britten selected bits and pieces of the original to set to music. Smart was an eighteenth-century poet, "deeply religious but of a strange and unbalanced mind", according to the Reverend Canon Walter Hussey, who commissioned the cantata in 1943 for the fiftieth anniversary of the consecration of St Matthew's Church, Northampton. The poem was written while Smart was in an asylum, and the main theme of the poem is the worship of God by all creatures and beings, each in its own way - demonstrated particularly by the sections about Smart's cat, and the mouse, both praising God simply by being themselves. See the back page for more details about Smart's poem.

### Les Chansons des Roses Morten Lauridsen (1943– )

Lauridsen is currently one of America's most-performed composers, probably most famous for *O magnum mysterium* (of which you can find a beautiful version on our youtube channel, recorded at Douai Abbey last summer!). *Les Chansons des Roses* were written in 1993, the year before *O magnum mysterium* and are based on poems by Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1976). In addition to Rilke's vast output of German poetry, he also wrote nearly 400 poems in French. Lauridsen's self-proclaimed second passion after music is poetry, and he says "Rilke's poems on roses struck me as especially charming, filled with gorgeous lyricism, deftly crafted and elegant in their imagery". Lauridsen actually wrote the final piece in the set, *Dirait-on*, first, and after his experience with this brilliant and wistful setting, he decided to create a complete song-cycle, based on Rilke's poetry, each text involving different aspects of the rose. The two main melodic ideas from *Dirait-on* are woven throughout the other songs in fragmentary form, creating a sort of intangible familiarity that catches the listener throughout the cycle, and making *Dirait-on* somehow feel like coming home.