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CLASSICS

A **PURCELL** COLLECTION



VOCES 8 ♦ Les Inventions

## A PURCELL COLLECTION

It is said that Henry Purcell never set foot outside England, in the same way that Johann Sebastian Bach hardly left his native Saxony. Yet, both have become pinnacles of our Western music culture to an extent they could have little imagined in their own lifetime. In terms of style, they were well-versed in their respective native traditions while being permanently on the lookout for all that was foreign. Bach emulated Vivaldi and admired Couperin. Purcell fed on Italian models and drew inspiration from the courtly manner of Lully. The corpus of Purcell's music, although not as large as Bach's, easily rivals it in terms of diversity. There is hardly a genre in which he did not express himself: anthems, odes, funeral music, semi-operas, masques, sonatas, consort-music, songs and catches populate his extraordinarily multifaceted œuvre. It is this astonishing diversity that we wish to celebrate by inviting the listener for a stroll through the world of one of England's greatest composers.

Our perambulation starts with **Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem**, an anthem composed for the coronation of William and Mary at Westminster Abbey in 1689. Opening with a sober yet

sumptuous instrumental symphony, the anthem's five-part vocal texture offers great richness, alternating imitative and contrasting material.

A change of scenery comes with **To the Hills and the Vales**, a great favourite from Purcell's only opera, *Dido and Aeneas*. Based on Book IV of Virgil's *Aeneid*, the plot recounts the love story of the Carthaginian queen Dido and the Trojan hero Aeneas, as well as her despair at his abandonment of her. The chorus celebrates their meeting, and urges them to enjoy their romance.

One of the most tender and touching pieces, **By Beauteous Softness Mix'd with Majesty**, is an excerpt from the birthday ode for Queen Mary *Now Does the Glorious Day Appear*, composed in 1689. Based on a ground, the vocal solo leads into an instrumental section of great meditative gentleness.

An early work dating from around 1680, the full anthem **O God, Thou Art my God** is widely known in Britain, appearing in an abundant number of manuscripts. Its final 'Hallelujah' even gave birth to a separate hymn-tune known to churchgoers as 'Westminster Abbey'. The composition, in archaic style, brings to light

the composer's debt to his precursors Tallis, Byrd and Gibbons, whose music he was familiar with from his youth. Those influences are obvious in the first homophonic phrase of the anthem, as well as the imitative sections which unfold with great melodic and harmonic inventiveness.

The chorus **How Happy the Lover** is from the semi-opera *King Arthur, or The British Worthy* (1691) setting a libretto by John Dryden. In Act IV, the sirens tempt Arthur into the stream, but to no avail. Then a group of nymphs and sylvans appear from behind the trees and – according to original stage directions – ‘sing and dance the following song, all with Branches in their Hands.’ Purcell weaves into this wonderfully sensual *passacaille* an array of diverse vocal settings: tutti, 3 female and 3 male voices, duets, etc. The influence of Lully and his *Passacaille d'Armide* is unmistakable.

Amongst many examples of French influence on opera in England, usually involving staging, costume and dance, the **Cold Song** stands out as a bestseller. From Act III of the semi-opera *King Arthur*, (libretto by Dryden), it is sung by the *Genie of the Isle* (of Britain) whom Cupid has woken from his frosty slumber beneath a

sheet of ice. The chilling effect of the piece is enhanced by the composer's indications to use *tremolo* in the vocal part and in the strings. It is likely that Purcell was alluding to a similar scene from the Lully-Quinault lyric-tragedy *Isis* from 1677.

The chorus **Behold O Mightiest of Gods** comes from the semi-opera *The Prophetess, or The History of Dioclesian* (1690), on a libretto by Thomas Betterton, actor-manager of the Queen's theatre at Dorset Garden. The opera closes on a *Masque of Cupid*, a tribute to King William III, as indicated by symbols and metaphors in the surviving staging instructions.\* A ‘masque’ was an allegorical insertion into a play or opera, commenting on the action through music and lavish choreography. This particular masque ends with a stately and resplendent section in which oboes and strings dialogue before the voices solemnly celebrate the God of Love's incontestable superiority.

The anthem **My Heart is Inditing of a Good Matter** was specially composed for the coronation of James II (April 23rd, 1685). According to a contemporary source, it was ‘performed by the whole Consort of Voices and Instruments’ after the coronation of his consort, Mary of Modena.

The splendour of the ceremony clearly appealed to Purcell's imagination, as he opted for an eight-part choir with string accompaniment. A joyful and majestic instrumental 'Symphony' alternates with impressive choral developments, whilst dance-like dotted figurations and rich harmonies evoke a sense of magnificence.

**Bid the Virtues** is an air from the ode *Come ye sons of Art, away*, the last of the six odes that Purcell composed for Queen Mary's birthday (April 30th 1694) as she died of smallpox that December, aged only 32. The piece is written as a trio, in which the vocal line interlaces sensually with the oboe above a smoothly unfolding bass-line.

The chorus **Hail! Bright Cecilia** comes from Purcell's *Ode to St. Cecilia* – his delightful work in honour of the patron saint of music. This was composed in 1692, on a text by Nicholas Brady and performed at Stationers' Hall. The chorus contains the immortal words 'great patroness of us – and harmony', where 'us' refers to the Gentlemen of the Musical Society, founded in the early 1680s. In the grave key of D minor, homophonic choral 'blocks' alternate with mighty fugal sections and a pair of amorous duets in recitative style.

**Strike the Viol** is another well-known song from the ode *Come ye sons of Art*. The text delightfully summons various musical instruments usually associated with sentiments of tenderness and devotion: '*Strike the viol, touch the lute; wake the harp, inspire the flute...*' and invites them to play in praise of their 'patroness', Queen Mary – diplomatically making an appreciative reference to the queen's generous patronage of Purcell himself. Again the whole structure reposes on a ground bass with episodic transitions during which the recorders ('flutes'), and violins playfully converse.

Purcell wrote **Thou Knowest, Lord, the Secrets of Our Hearts** for the funeral of Queen Mary II in March 1695. This took place at Westminster Abbey, where Purcell had been organist since 1679 and where, in less than a year's time, the same anthem would be sung again at his own burial. The text consists of a prayer for mercy recited at the graveside, before the body is interred. It had previously been customary at royal funerals to perform the Burial Music by the Tudor composer Thomas Morley (1557-1602). However, for reasons that are unclear, part of the **Second Dirge Anthem** got lost and so Purcell undertook the composition of a replacement setting of

the final sentence of the text. Whilst *Thou Knowest Lord* is not typical of Purcell's choral music, this intensely emotional work offers unexpected and dissonant harmonies whilst still sitting well alongside Morley's more conservative style.

The semi-opera *King Arthur*, like *Dioclesian*, ended with a masque. In the case of *King Arthur* the masque depicts a celebration of peace between Britons and Saxons, and the prediction of a bright future for Britain. **Fairest Isle** was sung by Venus, probably in a machine drawn by doves hovering over the Isle of Britain which has just 'risen from the sea'. It is one of Purcell's most tender and, at the same time, most vibrant melodies.

*The Tempest* (1695) is an example of the way in which, in the late 17th and 18th centuries, Shakespeare's plays were extensively re-written and adapted in order to make them conform to contemporary tastes. In this semi-opera of 1695, additional characters are created in order to 'balance' existing Shakespearean ones, including a female 'Spirit of the Air' as a partner for Ariel. It is she, rather than Ariel himself, who sings **Full Fathom Five**. In this picturesque solo followed by a chorus, the sea-nymphs' knell

is represented by mysterious bells chiming in the continuo.

As our journey through Purcell's extraordinary diversity comes to an end, and having witnessed his outstanding originality and creative power, it is hard to disagree with John Playford, a prominent music publisher of the time, who wrote in 1698, three years after Purcell's death, that the composer was '*especially admired for having a peculiar genius to express the energy of English words, whereby he moved the passions of all his auditors.*'

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\*exquisitely recreated by 17th-century English stage and theatre specialists Julie and Frans Muller [www.fransandjuliemuller.nl](http://www.fransandjuliemuller.nl)

## TEXTS

### 1 Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem

Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem: praise thy God, O Sion.  
For kings shall be thy nursing fathers,  
and queens thy nursing mothers.  
As we have heard, so have we seen:  
In the city of our God.  
God upholdeth the same for ever.

*From 'Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem' Z.46*

*Text: Psalm 147: 12; Isaiah 49: 23; Psalm 48: 8*

### 2 To the Hills and the Vales

To the hills and the vales,  
to the rocks and the mountains,  
to the musical groves and the cool shady fountains.  
Let the triumphs of love and beauty be shown.  
Go revel, ye Cupids, the day is your own.

*From 'Dido & Aeneas' Z.626*

*Text: Nahum Tate (1652-1715)*

### 3 By Beauteous Softness Mix'd with Majesty

By beauteous softness mix'd with majesty,  
An empire over every heart she gains;  
And from her awful power none would be free,  
She with such sweetness and such justice reigns.

*From 'Now Does the Glorious Day Appear' Z.332,*

*Text: Thomas Shadwell (1642-1692)*

### 4 O God, Thou Art my God

O God, thou art my God: early will I seek thee.  
My soul thirsteth for thee,  
my flesh also longeth after thee  
in a barren and dry land where no water is.  
Thus have I looked for thee in holiness,  
that I might behold thy power and glory.  
For thy loving kindness is better than life itself:  
My lips shall praise thee.  
As long as I live will I magnify thee on this manner  
and lift up my hands in thy Name.  
Because thou hast been my helper,  
therefore under the shadow of thy wings  
will I rejoice. Hallelujah.

*From 'O God, thou art my God, Z.35*

*Text: Psalm 63: 1-5, 8*

**5 How Happy The Lover**

How happy the lover,  
How easy his chain!  
How sweet to discover  
He sighs not in vain.

For love ev'ry creature  
Is form'd by his nature.  
No joys are above  
The pleasures of love.

In vain are our graces,  
In vain are your eyes.  
In vain are our graces  
If love you despise.  
When age furrows faces,  
'Tis too late to be wise.

Then use the sweet blessing  
While now in possessing.  
No joys are above  
The pleasures of love.

*From 'King Arthur' Z.628  
Text: John Dryden (1631-1700)*

**6 'Cold Song' (What Power Art Thou...)**

What power art thou, who from below  
Hast made me rise unwillingly and slow  
From beds of everlasting snow?  
See'st thou not how stiff and wondrous old,  
Far unfit to bear the bitter cold,  
I can scarcely move or draw my breath?  
Let me, let me freeze again to death.

*From 'King Arthur' Z.628  
Text: John Dryden*

**7 Behold, O Mightiest of Gods**

Behold, O mightiest of Gods, behold  
At thy command we come!  
The gay, the sad, the grave, the glad,  
The youthful and the old.  
All meet as at the day of Doom

*From 'The Prophetess, or The History of Dioclesian' Z.627,  
Text: Thomas Betterton (c.1635-1710), after 'The Prophetess' by  
Philip Massinger (1583-1640) and John Fletcher (1579-1625)*

## 8 My Heart is Inditing of a Good Matter

I.

My heart is inditing of a good matter:  
I speak of the things which I have made  
unto the King.  
At his right hand shall stand the Queen  
all glorious within:  
Her clothing is of wrought gold.

II.

She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of  
needlework;  
The virgins that follow her shall bear her company.  
With joy and gladness shall they be brought,  
And shall enter into the King's palace.

III.

Hearken, O daughter, consider, incline thine ear;  
Forget also thine own people and thy father's house.  
Instead of thy fathers thou shalt have children  
Whom thou may'st make princes in all lands.

IV.

Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem: praise thy God, O Sion;  
For kings shall be thy nursing fathers,  
And their queens thy nursing mothers.  
Alleluia. Amen.

*From 'My Heart is inditing' Z.30*

*Text: Psalms 45: 11, 9, 13-15, 10, 16; 47: 12; Isaiah 49: 23*

## 9 Bid the Virtues

Bid the Virtues, bid the Graces  
To the sacred shrine repair,  
Round the altar take their places,  
Blessing with returns of pray'r  
Their great Defender's care,  
While Maria's royal zeal  
Best instructs you how to pray  
Hourly from her own  
Conversing with th'Eternal Throne.

*From 'Come, ye sons of art away' Z.323*

*Text: attributed to Nahun Tate.*

## 10 Hail! Bright Cecilia

Hail! Bright Cecilia, Hail! fill every Heart!  
With Love of thee and thy Celestial Art;  
That thine and Musick's Sacred Love  
May make the British Forest prove  
As Famous as Dodona's Vocal Grove.

*From 'Hail, bright Cecilia' Z.328*

*Text: Nicholas Brady (1659-1726)*

**11 Strike the Viol**

Strike the viol, touch the lute;  
wake the harp, inspire the flute:  
sing your patroness's praise,  
in cheerful and harmonious lays.

*From 'Come, ye sons of art away' Z.323*

*Text: attributed to Nahun Tate.*

**12 Second Dirge Anthem (Morley) /  
Thou Knowest, Lord, the Secrets of Our Hearts**

Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time  
to live,

and is full of misery.

He cometh up, and is cut down like a flower;

He fleeth as it were a shadow,

and never continueth in one stay.

In the midst of life we are in death:

Of whom may we seek for succour,

but of Thee, O Lord,

Who for our sins art justly displeased?

Yet, O Lord God most holy, O Lord most mighty,

O holy and most merciful Saviour,

Deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death.

Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts;

shut not thy merciful ears unto our prayer;

but spare us, Lord most holy, O God most mighty,

O holy and most merciful Saviour,

thou most worthy Judge eternal,  
suffer us not, at our last hour,  
for any pains of death, to fall from thee.  
Amen.

*From 'Thou knowest, Lord' Z.58*

*Text: Burial Service*

**13 Fairest Isle**

Fairest isle, all isles excelling,  
Seat of pleasure and of love;  
Venus here will choose her dwelling,  
And forsake her Cyprian grove.  
Cupid from his favourite nation,  
Care and envy will remove;  
Jealousy that poisons passion,  
And despair that dies for love.

Gentle murmurs, sweet complaining,  
Sighs that blow the fire of love;  
Soft repulses, Kind disdainings,  
Shall be all the pains you prove.  
Every swain shall pay his duty,  
Grateful every nymph shall prove;  
And as these excel in beauty,  
Those shall be renowned for love.

*From 'King Arthur' Z.628*

*Text: John Dryden*

#### 14 Full Fathom Five

Full fathom five thy father lies;  
Of his bones are coral made;  
Those are pearls that were his eyes:  
Nothing of him that doth fade,  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange.  
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:  
Hark! now I hear them, Ding-dong, bell.

*From 'The Tempest' Z.631*

*Text: John Dryden and William Davenant after William Shakespeare  
(1564-1616)*

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## VOCES8

Andrea Haines, Emily Dickens – *Soprano*  
Christopher Wardle, Barnaby Smith – *Countertenor*  
Oliver Vincent, Samuel Dressel – *Tenor*  
Paul Smith, Dingle Yandell - *Bass*

VOCES8 is one of the most exciting and versatile vocal groups in the world. The multi award-winning ensemble fulfils an international annual touring schedule across Europe, the USA, Asia and

Africa. Performance venues include the Wigmore Hall, Royal Festival Hall, Tokyo Opera City, Mariinsky Theatre Concert Hall, Tel Aviv Opera House, National Concert Hall Taipei, Cité de la Musique in Paris, Dijon Opera House, National Centre for the Performing Arts Beijing and Shanghai Concert Hall.

With a specialism in classical choral music, the group performs repertoire ranging from Renaissance polyphony to unique Jazz and Pop arrangements. The ensemble regularly commissions and collaborates with world-renowned contemporary composers including Ola Gjeilo, Roxanna Panufnik, Thomas Hewitt Jones, Alexander Levine and Ben Parry. VOCES8 is delighted to be in partnership with the acclaimed arranger, Jim Clements as Arranger in Residence.

With an ongoing programme of recordings and live broadcast, VOCES8 is heard regularly on international television and radio, including Deutschlandradio, ARTE TV, Radio France Musique, BBC Radio 3 and Classic FM. VOCES8 is a Decca Classics Artist and has a busy and exciting release schedule that also includes a continuation of its series of award-winning discs with Signum Classics.

Outreach and Education are at the core of VOCES8's work and the group is delighted to be the flagship performance and education ensemble of the charitable music foundation, Voces Cantabiles Music (VCM). The ensemble leads an innovative series of music education workshops reaching 20,000 people annually around the world with the aim of inspiring creativity and excellence through music. The innovative education work of VCM has received praise from UNESCO. In 2013 VCM established the Gresham Centre in partnership with the

Diocese of London, a centre for vocal music and education at St Anne & St Agnes Church, in the heart of the City of London.

Artistic collaborations with orchestras have included the Philharmonia, London Philharmonic Orchestra and period ensemble Les Inventions. VOCES8 has received support from Arts Council England, the Musicians Benevolent Fund, the Concordia Foundation and the Worshipful Company of Musicians.

[www.voces8.com](http://www.voces8.com)



## LES INVENTIONS

The early music ensemble Les Inventions was founded in 2005 by harpsichordist, organist and conductor Patrick Ayrton. Since then it has been at the heart of a network of international musical collaborations through concerts, artistic exchanges and publications. The ensemble has sought to revitalize the ancient tradition of harmoniously combining elements of music, poetry and dance into one performance. Les Inventions also aim to reawaken interest in forgotten composers and to restore neglected

works to their place in the repertoire. One particular project was the release of a world première recording of works by the French Tartini-pupil Joseph Touchemoulin (1727-1801), a CD which has gained wide acclaim and received much praise in the press (BBC, Diapason, Classica, etc). Based in France, the ensemble performs there and abroad in major concert series such as the Dijon Opera, the Lyric Center in Clermont-Ferrand, “Early Music at Souvigny”, the Ravello and Early Music in Magnano festivals in Italy, and the Early Music series in Baarn, The Netherlands.



Les Inventions have been for six years in residence at France's leading Bach festival, Bach en Combrailles, in the Auvergne. The ensemble is sponsored by the Regional Agency of Cultural Affairs (DRAC) and the Regional Council of Burgundy (CRB) and the City of Chalon-sur-Saône.

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Varoujan Doneyan – *violin*

Louise Ayrton – *violin*

Kayo Saito – *viola*

Felix Knecht – *violoncello*

Thomas de Pierrefeu – *violone*

Simon Linné – *theorbo*

Guillaume Cuiller – *oboe*

Laura Duthuillé – *oboe*

Gwénaél Bihan – *recorder*

Armelle Brouard-Plantier – *recorder*

Patrick Ayrton – *organ and harpsichord*

Keyboards: Chest organ by Quentin Blumenroeder, Hagenau (2013) / Flemish harpsichord by Joel Katzman, Amsterdam (1997) after Ruckers, Antwerp (1638)

**[www.lesinventions.fr](http://www.lesinventions.fr)**

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**T.M.Lewin**

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1	<b>Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem</b>	[7.25]
2	<b>To the Hills and the Vales</b>	[2.30]
3	<b>By Beauteous Softness Mix'd with Majesty</b> Barnaby Smith <i>countertenor</i>	[3.34]
4	<b>O God, Thou Art my God</b>	[3.51]
5	<b>How Happy the Lover</b> Andrea Haines <i>soprano</i> , Samuel Dressel <i>tenor</i> , Dingle Yandell <i>bass</i>	[6.19]
6	<b>'Cold Song' (What Power Art Thou...)</b> Dingle Yandell <i>bass</i>	[4.26]
7	<b>Behold, O Mightiest of Gods</b>	[3.22]
8	<b>My Heart is Inditing of a Good Matter</b>	[15.03]
9	<b>Bid the Virtues</b> Emily Dickens <i>soprano</i>	[3.17]
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13	<b>Fairest Isle</b> Andrea Haines <i>soprano</i>	[4.40]
14	<b>Full Fathom Five</b>	[2.24]
	Total timings:	[70.18]

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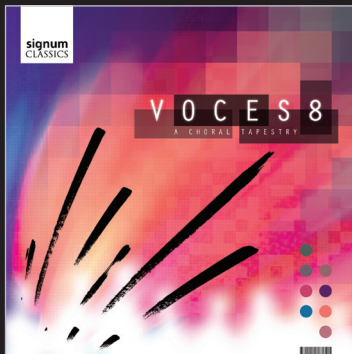


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