Andreas Scholl and Philippe Jaroussky sing Purcell

Andreas Scholl countertenor
Philippe Jaroussky countertenor
Ensemble Artaserse
Henry Purcell (1659–95)

Bonduca – Overture
Timon of Athens – Hark how the songsters of the grove (duet)
King Arthur – Fairest isle
Come, ye sons of Art, away – Strike the Viol
Hail, bright Cecilia – Hark! hark! each tree (duet)
Abdelazar – Suite
Hail, bright Cecilia – In vain the am’rous flute (duet)
Now that the sun
The Fairy Queen – One charming night
Come, ye sons of Art, away – Sound the trumpet (duet)

The Fairy Queen – Overture
Come, ye sons of Art, away – Bid the Virtues
King Arthur – Hither, this way
Pausanias – Sweeter than roses
O solitude
The Fairy Queen – Suite
Pausanias – My dearest, my fairest (duet)
Oedipus, King of Thebes – Music for a while
The Fairy Queen – O let me weep
The Fairy Queen – Now the night (duet)

Programme details correct at the time of going to press.
‘Too soon retir’d’ – the unique genius of the English Orpheus

In his preface to Orpheus Britannicus, Henry Playford notes how Purcell was blessed with ‘a peculiar genius to express the energy of English words, whereby he moved the passions of all his auditors’. Playford’s publication, issued three years after the composer’s death, stood as a fitting memorial to a man capable of marrying verbal ideas to musical imagery and, as the poet Christopher Smart so aptly put it, thereby singing ‘the subject to life’.

This evening’s programme, constructed from music of extraordinary richness and enduring popularity, charts the heaven of invention occupied by Purcell, the ‘English Orpheus’. ‘So ceas’d the rival crew when Purcell came, they sung no more, or only sung his fame,’ wrote John Dryden following the composer’s untimely death in 1695. ‘Struck dumb, they all admir’d the godlike man: the godlike man alas! too soon retir’d, as he too late began.’

The energy of English words certainly fuelled many of Purcell’s finest works, from simple songs and duets to eloquent courtly odes and incidental music crafted for the London stage. Even the stiffest of poetic ideas, often clad in emotionally barren Restoration couplets, served to unlock the composer’s rich musical imagination. Most remarkable of all, perhaps, is the fact that English song with continuo accompaniment was still in its infancy when Purcell first turned his hand to the genre in the late 1670s. In under two decades he proceeded to create some of the finest songs ever written by an Englishman.

In the early months of 1678, Thomas Shadwell scored a palpable hit with his adaptation of Shakespeare’s Timon of Athens. The Second-Act masque from the original production was set to music by Louis Grabu, the French-trained Master of the King’s Musick. Purcell was engaged to write a fresh score for the work’s revival at the Drury Lane Theatre in the summer of 1695. He transformed Shadwell’s gently reflective masque of Cupid and Bacchus into a taut mini-drama in which the pleasures and pains of love, profligacy and fidelity emerge as strongly contrasting themes. ‘Hark how the songsters’ presents a portrait of idyllic love, cannily depicted by the composer through his use of a gently rocking bass accompaniment and avoidance of dissonant harmony.

A good deal of ink has been spilled on the subject of King Arthur, its allegorical meaning and the relationship between Purcell’s music and John Dryden’s libretto. Curtis Price, writing in the early 1980s, was among the first scholars to interpret the political overtones and subtexts of Dryden’s verse. King Arthur appears to have evolved from a work originally intended as an allegory on the so-called Exclusion Crisis (concerning the line of succession following Charles II’s death) into a Restoration stage spectacular adapted for the more settled circumstances of William and Mary’s joint reign. The theatre manager Thomas Betterton, encouraged by the popular success of Purcell’s Dioclesian in 1690, persuaded Dryden to revise King Arthur for the composer
to set as a semi-opera in five acts. The poet made his alterations and additions in order ‘not to offend the present Time, nor a Government that has hitherto protected me’, and to enable Purcell ‘to please the ear’.

*King Arthur* was first performed at the Dorset Garden Theatre in May or June 1691 and proved an instant hit. The air for Venus from Act 5, ‘Fairest isle’, stands proud even when heard in the context of a work liberally adorned with excellent music, its melody ideally engineered to intensify the seductive sentiments of Dryden’s lyric. An instrumental arrangement of the piece, published posthumously by Purcell’s widow in 1697, and frequent revivals of *King Arthur* during the following century helped secure the song’s lasting place in the canon of English music. ‘Hither, this way’ follows the prelude to *King Arthur*’s Second Act, a sprightly song, folk-like in character, delivered by Philidel to lead the besieged Britons away from pursuing Saxons through treacherous terrain towards safety.

One evening in the long hot summer of 1911, a large crowd made its way to London’s Royal Victoria Hall. The Old Vic audience gathered to hear the first performance in modern times of Henry Purcell’s *The Fairy Queen*, given by students from Morley College under the direction of Gustav Holst. The semi-opera’s original theatre score, lost since the 1690s, had surfaced around 10 years earlier in the Royal Academy of Music’s library. Holst and his student company presented *The Fairy Queen* as a concert piece, shorn of the spectacular stage effects employed when the work entered the world at Dorset Garden on 2 May 1692. However, their amateur efforts convinced listeners of the extraordinary quality of Purcell’s music, even if the work’s apparent want of dramatic unity has remained a stumbling block for countless productions since.

*The Fairy Queen* was conceived as a musical complement to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, its five masques built from a libretto newly crafted by anonymous hands and woven into the fabric of Shakespeare’s wedding comedy. Recent research suggests that the piece may have been intended to preface the 15th-wedding-anniversary celebrations of William and Mary in November 1692. Love is certainly in the air in *The Fairy Queen*, especially so in its final masque. ‘O let me weep’ – commonly known as ‘The Plaint’ – presents the dark face of human attachment in the form of an extended lament for soprano and solo violin (or recorder) above a freely varied ground bass. The song probably began life as an independent piece and was first published as such in *Orpheus Britannicus* in 1698. It has become a staple of the countertenor repertoire, thanks not least to pioneering recordings by Alfred Deller and James Bowman.

The work’s Second Act opens in fairyland, where Titania stages an entertainment for her followers before she prepares for sleep. ‘One charming night’, sung by Secrecy
accompanied by two recorders and continuo, deftly evokes the nocturnal world’s power to intensify physical pleasures. Supernatural dealings are temporarily suspended at the beginning of Act 4 to make way for a masque to celebrate Oberon’s birthday. ‘Now the night is chac’d away’ sets the festivities underway in joyful style, although Purcell momentarily subverts the happy mood by diverting his ground bass from D major to B minor.

London’s theatres, outlawed and suppressed during Oliver Cromwell’s Protectorate, returned to life following the Restoration in 1660. The capital’s stage companies supplied Purcell with fresh creative challenges, an attractive proposition for a composer employed elsewhere to supply music for the formal ceremonies favoured by the royal court and chapel. In the early months of 1695 he was commissioned to supply incidental music for a revival of Abdelazer, a tragedy by Aphra Benn first produced almost 20 years earlier. The show, presented in April by the Patent Company at the Drury Lane Theatre, included a new song and a complete set of instrumental dances by Purcell, among them the sprightly D minor rondeau chosen by Benjamin Britten as the theme for The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra. Purcell’s incidental music for John Fletcher’s Jacobean tragedy Bonduca, revived in adapted form in autumn 1695, stands among the composer’s final works. The show’s martial tone, emblematic of warring Britons and Romans, is immediately established in the heroic trumpet call of Purcell’s Overture.

In 1683 the Musical Society instituted an annual celebration of St Cecilia’s Day (22 November), to honour music’s patron saint and give focus to a custom that already appears to have been observed for some time. Purcell launched the series with his first Cecilian ode, Welcome to all the pleasures, and was commissioned to supply a second ode for the 1692 St Cecilia’s Day festivities. Hail, bright Cecilia proved to be the composer’s masterpiece in the genre, grand in scale, intricate in expressive contrasts and wonderfully diverse in its mix of solo airs, duets and choruses. Dryden’s coruscating verse clearly inspired Purcell to exceed by far the expectations set for an occasional piece. ‘In vain the am’rous flute’ was created for the tenor Moses Snow and the countertenor John Freeman, fast becoming a star turn on the London stage. The ‘high contratenor’ line in the duet ‘Hark! hark! each tree its silence breaks’ was sung at the work’s first performance by John Howell, a lay vicar at Westminster Abbey, while the bass part was taken by Leonard Woodson, a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal. Purcell took full advantage of the range of vocal colours available to each of his St Cecilia’s Day singers.

Come, ye sons of Art, away is the last of six successive odes written by Purcell from 1689 to 1694 to mark the birthday of
Queen Mary. The piece was performed on 30 April 1694, eight months before the monarch’s death from smallpox. ‘The work is even more tightly organised than Hail, bright Cecilia’, observes Peter Holman in his Purcell monograph. ‘Bid the Virtues, bid the Graces’ emerges from the structure because of its declamatory style and individuality to command the work’s emotional centre. ‘It is worthy of its [central] role,’ Holman suggests, ‘for it is a poignant piece, scored in an unusual and effective way as a duet for soprano and oboe, the latter greatly echoing the former’. The duet ‘Sound the trumpet’, built above a fleet-footed ground bass, highlights the fecundity of Purcell’s creative imagination in a potentially constraining musical form. An apocryphal story suggests that it also contains an in-joke at the expense of the Shore family, highly regarded and highly paid royal trumpeters. Booked to perform the trumpet parts elsewhere in Purcell’s birthday ode, they had nothing to do in ‘Sound the trumpet’ other than attend to the words, ‘You make the list’ning shores rebound’ among them. ‘Strike the Viol’, an evocation of music’s inspiring power, underlines the composer’s mastery of the ground bass form in its ravishing melodic writing for solo countertenor and concluding instrumental ritornello.

One of Purcell’s greatest songs, ‘Music for a while’, was probably commissioned for inclusion in the 1692 revival of John Dryden and Nathaniel Lee’s tragedy Oedipus. The emotionally charged setting complements the sensuous nature of Dryden’s verse. Richard Norton’s long-forgotten play of 1695, Pausanius, the Betrayer of His Country, contains another example of Purcell at his best. ‘Sweeter than roses’ unlocks the erotic heart of Norton’s song of seduction, originally written for the courtesan character Pandora, particularly so in its impassioned treatment of the lines ‘was the dear kiss, First trembling made me freeze, Then shot like fire all o’er’. Pandora’s erotic musings continue in the duet ‘My dearest, my fairest’, ascribed in one early manuscript source to Purcell’s younger brother, Daniel. A five-bar ground underpins Now that the sun, Purcell’s Evening Hymn. The composer’s setting of words by William Fuller, Bishop of Lincoln, shrewdly deploys the voice part to overlap and disguise multiple repetitions of the bass. He extends the song’s prevailing penitential mood to inform its concluding 40-bar meditation on the word ‘Hallelujah’. O solitude, my sweetest choice, another song to a ground, sets a poem written in the 1660s by Kathleen Philips. Purcell here uses a ground bass that also appears in his anthem In thee, O Lord, which he skilfully subjects to a series of momentary modulations and contrasts with the composition’s ‘home’ key of C minor.

Programme note © Andrew Stewart
Timon of Athens – Hark how the songsters of the grove
Hark how the songsters of the grove
Sing anthems to the God of Love.
Hark how each am’rous winged pair
With Love’s great praises fills the air,
On ev’ry side the charming sound
Does from the hollow woods rebound.

King Arthur – 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 fav’rite 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 disdaining,
Shall be all the pains you prove.
Ev’ry swain shall pay his duty,
Grateful ev’ry nymph shall prove;
And as these excel in beauty,
Those shall be renown’d for love.

Come, ye sons of Art, away – Strike the Viol
Strike the Viol, touch the Lute;
Wake the Harp, inspire the Flute;
Sing your Patronesse’s Praise,
In cheerful and harmonious Lays.

Hail, Bright Cecilia – Hark, hark each tree
Hark! hark! each Tree its silence breaks,
The Box and Fir to talk begin!
This is the sprightly Violin
That in the Flute distinctly speaks!’
’Twas Sympathy their list’ning Brethren drew,
When to the Thracian Lyre with leafy Wings they flew.

Hail, bright Cecilia – In vain the am’rous flute
In vain the am’rous flute and soft guitar
Jointly labour to inspire
Wanton heat and loose desire,
Whilst those chaste airs do gently move
Seraphic flames and heav’nly love.

Now that the sun
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!

The Fairy Queen – One charming night
One charming Night
Gives more delight,
Than a hundred lucky Days.
Night and I improve the tast,
Make the pleasure longer last,
A thousand, thousand several ways.

Come, ye sons of Art, away – Sound the trumpet
Sound the trumpet till around
You make the list’ning shores rebound.
On the sprightly hautboy play
All the instruments of joy
That skilful numbers can employ
To celebrate the glories of this day.

INTERVAL

Come, ye sons of Art, away – 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.
King Arthur – Hither, this way
Hither, this way, this way bend,
Trust not the malicious fiend.
Those are false deluding lights
Wafted far and near by sprites.
Trust ‘em not, for they’ll deceive ye,
And in bogs and marshes leave ye.
If you step no longer thinking,
Down you fall, a furlong sinking.
’Tis a fiend who has annoy’d ye;
Name but Heav’n, and he’ll avoid ye.
Hither, this way.

Pausanias – Sweeter than roses
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.

O solitude
O solitude, my sweetest choice!
Places devoted to the night,
Remote from tumult and from noise,
How ye my restless thoughts delight!
O solitude, my sweetest choice!
O heav’ns! what content is mine
To see these trees, which have appear’d
From the nativity of time,
And which all ages have rever’d,
To look today as fresh and green
As when their beauties first were seen.
O, how agreeable a sight
These hanging mountains do appear,
Which th’unhappy would invite
To finish all their sorrows here,
When their hard fate makes them endure
Such woes as only death can cure.
O, how I solitude adore!
That element of noblest wit,
Where I have learnt Apollo’s lore,
Without the pains to study it.
For thy sake I in love am grown
With what thy fancy does pursue;

But when I think upon my own,
I hate it for that reason too,
Because it needs must hinder me
From seeing and from serving thee.
O solitude, O how I solitude adore!

Pausanias – My dearest, my fairest
My dearest, my fairest, I languish for you.
Thy kindness has won me,
Thy charm has undone me,
I ne’er, no ne’er, shall be free.
I faint with the pleasure I fain would repeat,
Ah, why are love’s raptures so short and so sweet?
Thus pressing and kissing, fresh joys we’ll pursue
And ever be happy and ever be true.
But, alas, should you change, ah tell me not so!
No never my dearest, no never my fairest, no, no.

Oedipus, King of Thebes – Music for a while
Music for a while shall all your cares beguile,
Wond’ring how your pains were eas’d
And disdaining to be pleas’d
Till Alecto free the dead from their eternal bands,
Till the snakes drop from her head,
And the whip from out her hands.
Music for a while shall all your cares beguile.

The Fairy Queen – O let me weep
O let me weep, for ever weep,
My Eyes no more shall welcome Sleep;
I’ll hide me from the sight of Day,
And sigh, and sigh my Soul away.
He’s gone, he’s gone, his loss deplore;
And I shall never see him more.

The Fairy Queen – Now the night
Now the Night is chac’d away,
All salute the rising Sun;
’Tis that happy, happy Day,
The Birth-Day of King Oberon.
About the performers

Andreas Scholl countertenor

Andreas Scholl has released a series of highly acclaimed solo recordings, including Songs of Myself (the songs of Oswald von Wolkenstein); Arias for Senesino, for which he won the 2006 Classical Brit Singer of the Year award; Heroes, a disc of arias by Handel, Mozart, Hasse and Gluck; Robert Dowland’s A Musicall Banquet; Vivaldi Motets with the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra; Wayfaring Stranger, a selection of specially arranged English and American folksongs with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra; and Arcadia, a collection of rare and unpublished cantatas by composers from Rome’s Arcadian Circle. His discography also includes Solomon and Saul under Paul McCreesh, the Gramophone Award-winning accounts of Vivaldi’s Stabat mater and Caldara’s Maddalena ai piedi di Cristo; Il duello amoroso and a selection of Handel’s Italian cantatas with Accademia Bizantina; and Crystal Tears (songs of Dowland).

A committed recitalist, Andreas Scholl performs at the world’s leading concert halls and festivals, including at the Last Night of the Proms in 2005. He has appeared with the Cleveland Orchestra, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin, Freiburger Barockorchester and the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra.

Operatic engagements have included Bertarido (Rodelinda), Arsace (Partenope) and the title-role in Giulio Cesare.

This season’s highlights include an extensive European tour with Accademia Bizantina and the current series of concerts with Philippe Jaroussky and Ensemble Artaserse, a major recital tour of Australia featuring works by Purcell and Handel plus recitals in Zurich, Schwarzenberg, Barcelona, Bergen and at the Wigmore Hall – his first with piano. His new Purcell album, O Solitude, is about to be released on Decca.

Andreas Scholl was born in Germany and his early musical training was with the Kiedricher Chorbuben. He later went on to study under Richard Levitt and René Jacobs at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis. Among his many awards are two ECHO Awards, a Prix de l’Union de la Presse Musicale Belge and an Edison Award in 2002 for A Musicall Banquet.
Philippe Jaroussky countertenor

Still only in his early thirties, the countertenor Philippe Jaroussky is acclaimed as one of the leading singers of his generation, combining a virtuoso technique and sensitive musicianship in repertoire from the Baroque to contemporary music. He began his musical training as a violinist before turning to singing, earning a diploma from the Paris Conservatoire’s Early Music department. In 2004 he was voted Operatic Revelation of the Year at the Victoires de la Musique Classique. This year he received his fourth Victoire de la Musique and his many other accolades include Gramophone, Echo Klassik and MIDEM awards.

Philippe Jaroussky made his debut in 1999, performing at the Royaumont and Ambronay festivals in Scarlatti’s oratorio Sedecia with Il Seminario Musicale and Gérard Lesne. With La Grande Écurie et la Chambre du Roy and Jean-Claude Malgoire, he performed in three Monteverdi operas, as well as appearing as Arbace (Vivaldi’s Catone in Utica) and singing Vivaldi’s Nisi Dominus and Pergolesi’s Stabat mater. Appearances at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées include Nerone in Handel’s Agrippina and several Vivaldi operas with Ensemble Matheus and Jean-Christophe Spinosi. Other ensembles with which he has worked include Les Arts Florissants, Les Musiciens du Louvre-Grenoble, Le Concert d’Astrée, L’Arpeggiata, Le Cercle de l’Harmonie and Europa Galante as well as with pianist Jérôme Ducros. He recently joined Cecilia Bartoli and Les Arts Florissants for concert performances of Giulio Cesare, returning to work with the same ensemble under William Christie for L’incoronazione di Poppea at the Teatro Real, Madrid.

Among the prestigious venues in which Philippe Jaroussky has sung are the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Salle Pleyel, the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels, the Vienna Konzerthaus, Berlin Staatsoper and Philharmonie, Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center and the Barbican Centre.

His many recordings include three award-winning discs with his own group, Ensemble Artaserse, which he co-founded in 2002 – of works by Benedetto Ferrari, virtuoso Vivaldi cantatas, and 17th-century Italian music in honour of the Virgin Mary. Among his latest releases are La dolce fiamma, an album of castrato arias by J. C. Bach, and Caldara in Venice.
Ensemble Artaserse

Ensemble Artaserse was founded in 2002 by a group of four musicians: Christine Plubeau, Claire Antonini, Yoko Nakamura and Philippe Jaroussky. Their first concert was dedicated to the music of Benedetto Ferrari, which was subsequently recorded and won a number of awards.

The group soon expanded in order to perform 18th-century repertoire, with the original line-up joined by cellist Emilia Gliozzi, bassoonist Jérémie Papasergio, and the theorbo-players Marc Wolff and Marco Horvat. This has made Ensemble Artaserse extremely adaptable in terms of repertoire.

It is in demand at leading festivals both in France and internationally and has appeared in such prestigious venues as the Auditorium du Louvre, Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, the Château de Versailles, the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels, the Escorial in Madrid, Palau de la Música in Valencia, the Southbank Centre, Barbican Centre and the Philharmonie Hall in Krakow.

The ensemble’s discography includes Ferrari’s *Musiche a voce sola* and two acclaimed albums for Virgin Classics: virtuoso cantatas by Vivaldi and *Beata Vergine*, which features 17th-century Italian music devoted to the Virgin Mary.

This season, Ensemble Artaserse makes its debut at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées with tonight’s two countertenors. In June it undertook a tour to Stockholm and to the festivals of Haut-Jura, Saint-Michel, Angers and Froville.

Next year the ensemble will make its Japanese debut, as well as performing in the Château de Versailles and at the festivals of Auvers-sur-Oise, Saint Riquier and Uzès. It will also give concerts in Germany – in Bad Kissingen, Stuttgart and Schleswig-Holstein.

Further ahead, in June 2012 Philippe Jaroussky and Ensemble Artaserse will tour with contralto Marie-Nicole Lemieux with a programme devoted to 17th-century music.
about the performers

Ensemble Artaserse

**Violin**
Alessandro Tampieri
Raúl Orellana

**Viola**
Marco Massera

**Flute**
Luis Beduschi
Margret Görner

**Oboe**
Jean-Marc Philippe
Clémentine Humeau

**Viola da gamba**
Christine Plubeau

**Bass Viola da gamba**
Richard Myron

**Theorbo**
Claire Antonini

**Theorbo/Guitar**
Marco Horvat

**Harpsichord**
Yoko Nakamura

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