JOHN BLOW AN ODE ON THE DEATH OF MR. HENRY PURCELL

BEGIN THE SONG!

THE NYMPHS OF THE WELLS

DREAD SIR, THE PRINCE OF LIGHT

SONATA IN A CHACONNE IN G

GROUND IN G MINOR

SAMUEL BODEN · THOMAS WALKER

ARCANGELO · JONATHAN COHEN
JOHN BLOW
(1649–1708)

SAMUEL BODEN tenor
THOMAS WALKER tenor

ARCANGELO
SOPHIE GENT violin 1  SIMON JONES violin 2 & viola  REBECCA JONES viola
JONATHAN MANSON viola da gamba  TIMOTHY AMHERST violone
ELIZABETH KENNY theorbo & guitar
BENJAMIN PERROT theorbo & lute
SEBASTIEN MARQ, IAN WILSON recorder
JONATHAN COHEN harpsichord & organ
EMMA WALSHE, ZOË BROOKSHAW soprano
DAVID ALLSOPP countertenor  NICHOLAS MADDEN tenor
WILLIAM GAUNT, CALLUM THORPE bass

JONATHAN COHEN conductor
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32 Solo, trio & tutti This message we bring SAMUEL BODEN, WILLIAM GAUNT & THOMAS WALKER [3'28]
JOHN BLOW is one of the greatest of not-quite-forgotten English composers. Conscripted as a choirboy from Newark Parish Church to the Chapel Royal of Charles II by the redoubtable Captain Henry Cooke—a royalist hero in the civil war, and one of the leading choir-trainers in his period—Blow rose to become a Gentleman (adult singer) of the Chapel and one of its three organists, and by his mid-twenties royal choirmaster. He was a famous teacher of composition, and specifically of old-fashioned counterpoint, a severe but hugely valuable discipline. He also became organist of Westminster Abbey—generously yielding the post in 1679 to his pupil Henry Purcell, whose brilliance urgently demanded that he be kept in London, and whose then impending marriage might have forced him to accept a provincial appointment. The lives and careers of the two men were thereafter closely intertwined, and they remained close friends until Purcell’s early death. After that Blow resumed his tenure at the Abbey, also serving as organist and choirmaster at Wren’s new St Paul’s Cathedral, consecrated in 1697—a post which he later relinquished in favour of another brilliant pupil, Jeremiah Clarke. So busy a pluralist must have found time for composition frustratingly limited. Yet Blow became the leading composer of music, secular and sacred alike, for the court (though he held no official post as composer until 1700, fifteen years after Charles’s death). His huge output includes well over a hundred anthems, ten services, forty odes, most of them for the court, more than 120 secular and devotional songs, the earliest all-sung English opera, Venus and Adonis (the model for Purcell’s Dido and Aeneas), and a smaller corpus of chamber and keyboard music.

The ode Begin the Song! was composed in 1684, not for the court but for St Cecilia’s Day, whose public celebration Purcell had founded the previous year. On the saint’s festival, 22 November, was held a choral service, including a sermon in praise of sacred music, followed by a grand dinner and the performance of a newly commissioned ode. In 1684 the lot of composer fell to Blow, who was presented with a poem by John Oldham, focusing not, like most later Cecilian odes, on the properties of the various musical instruments but instead on the power of harmony to move the soul. Blow responded with a work whose ambitious scale contrives to outdo Purcell’s first effort, Welcome to all the pleasures—though not too ostentatiously: the rivalry between the two composers was always friendly. An intriguing example of that rivalry is the final solo in the setting, ‘Music’s the cordial of a troubled breast’—obviously written for the celebrated deep bass John Gostling—which includes a repeated gradual descent, punctuated by rests, to a cavernous bottom D, at ‘calms the ruffling passions’. The passage is strikingly similar to one in Purcell’s contemporaneous, and marvellously vivid, symphony anthem They that go down to the sea in ships, at the words ‘so that the waves thereof are still’. Unfortunately, who on this occasion cribbed the idea from whom is not known. The other highlights of Blow’s setting are its imposing opening symphony, of which both sections display mastery of imitative counterpoint, and the duet ‘Hark how the waken’d strings resound’, finely wrought over a ground (reiterated) bass. Such structures had originated in Italy earlier in the century, and Italian examples were keenly studied in Restoration England. The movement is directly influenced by—or pays homage to—one in Welcome to all the pleasures, ‘Here the deities approve’, which includes a ground in the same key (E minor), finally blossoming in very similar fashion into a rich string ritornello. But Blow’s ground is longer and more complex than Purcell’s, and his ritornello, unlike its model, daringly permits the ground at one point to be shared by the bass with the inner parts—a highly original stroke, which Purcell did not emulate until a couple of years later.

The Chaconne in G major, scored for four-part strings, is also composed over an ostinato, this time not
a bass line but a reitered chord sequence—another Italian import. As with many pieces of its kind, Blow’s example features increasingly lively figuration in successive variations, until calm is restored in a chromatically tinged closing passage.

After Purcell’s death at the age of only thirty-six, several leading musicians were moved to compose odes in tribute to him. The grandest, laid out for soloists, chorus and full orchestra, is by Clarke, but incomparably the finest is Blow’s Ode on the Death of Mr Henry Purcell ‘Mark how the lark and linnet sing’, modestly scored for two ‘countertenors’ (who in the period were simply light tenors, singing almost entirely with the full voice and slipping into falsetto only for the very highest notes), two recorders (instruments closely associated with mourning), and continuo. Blow’s music rises to the same lofty heights as its superb elegiac poem, by John Dryden, the greatest poet of the age and another close associate of Purcell’s. (Dryden nevertheless made one mis-step, describing Purcell as ‘the god-like man’; hearing his former pupil and lifelong friend deified evidently stuck in Blow’s craw, for he substituted what turned out to be the best known verbal phrase in the work: ‘the matchless man’.) The music is expansive, and compelling in its structural logic. It opens with a majestic duet in two movements (sombre common time, followed by triple), both with recorders. Next comes an extended solo in three movements, the first of them without recorders and focusing the hearer’s attention on declamatory vocal writing that is as eloquent as Purcell’s best. The ode ends with another two-movement duet (again first in common time, then triple). Both duets display all Blow’s formidable command of counterpoint, while the solo writing is consistently expressive in the highest degree. Indeed, the work is not merely one of his finest—and very obviously heartfelt—but one of the most outstanding musical achievements of its entire period.

The date of composition of the **Ground in G minor** is unknown but, intriguingly, it shares both its scoring and key with a Purcell trio sonata constructed over a ground bass, a work which dates probably from the early 1680s, and which follows a similar trajectory: as with the G major Chaconne, both grounds gradually increase in animation until busy rhythmic activity subsides into a more reflective conclusion. Another version survives of Blow’s piece, scored for a single violin and bass; it is probably the original, the hand of the arranger of the present two-violin version being betrayed at the beginning of the ninth variation, where the ground is passed, abruptly and for only a couple of bars, to the second violin part, and there decorated.

The Nymphs of the wells is a royal ode dating from 1697. It was written not for the court of William III but for that of Princess Anne and her husband, Prince George of Denmark, a much more modest establishment. Accordingly its scoring is suitably economical: just two violins, five voices and continuo. It was commissioned for the eighth birthday celebrations of their son, William, Duke of Gloucester, the only one of their children to survive beyond infancy, and second in line to the throne after his mother (the king being childless and widowed). Its anonymous text seeks to associate the lad with the British oak: a grotesquely inappropriate conceit, for he was a deformed and sickly child who was to die at the age of eleven, thereby dashing any hopes of a Stuart succession. Blow’s setting, in contrast, strikes exactly the right note: avoiding any hint of pomp, it is graceful and lyrical, only becoming a little more serious in tone for the bass solo during which that unsuitable image is conjured up. The solo is sung by a Druid, in response to duetting Nymphs who appear earlier; such dramatic characterization—here obviously playful—is unknown in other court odes. The young duke is not known to have been musical (somewhat pathetically in the circumstances, his main interests were military), but if he had been, he would
surely have taken pleasure in the well judged and beautifully crafted music of this birthday offering.

Blow composed only a solitary trio sonata (unless we count the G minor Ground). In the **Sonata in A major**, perhaps surprisingly, he eschewed the dazzling contrapuntal fireworks of examples by Purcell—nearly two dozen masterpieces all told—in favour of a more relaxed and, in places, markedly lyrical style. The main theme of the triple-time central movement, for instance, bears a striking resemblance to the wonderful melody that occurs at the corresponding point in the opening symphony of Blow’s symphony anthem *The Lord is my shepherd*, composed by 1677. But the trio sonata probably dates from two or three years later, when Purcell (emulating, as he put it, ‘the most fam’d Italian masters’) began exploring the enormous potential of this genre—the quintessence of instrumental chamber music in the period, much as was the string quartet a century later.

In the court calendar the celebration of New Year’s Day was one of the two main events of the year, the other being the King’s birthday. An ode text, commenting on recent events, was commissioned for the occasion from a court poet, and set to music by a court composer: not so much high art, in principle, as a kind of musico-poetic political cartoon, though the magnificent efforts of some of the composers have secured belated immortality for many odes. Those for New Year were always set by Blow, who shared responsibility for birthday odes with his colleagues. A third series, marking the court’s autumn return to London from its ‘remove’ to more salubrious Windsor, was introduced in 1680, with twenty-year-old Purcell placed in charge. The Chapel Royal, for once at full strength (its Gentlemen normally served on a rota), and the royal string orchestra, the celebrated Twenty-Four Violins, performed the new work—in most cases its only hearing, until an inquiring posterity recently began to explore this treasure trove. The ode was an offspring of the symphony anthem, featuring an instrumental prelude or symphony, with instrumental interludes interposed between sections of text variously as solos, vocal ensembles and choruses. **Dread Sir, the Prince of Light**, composed for the 1678 celebrations, is a typical example. Its symphony opens with a dignified statement in common time prefacing a fleet-footed triple-time fugato; there follows a brisk succession of simple and mostly light-hearted numbers—some of them distinctly catchy in the ‘step tripla’, the dance-like triple metre favoured by the king—though a weightier declamatory bass solo, ‘This happy omen’, anticipates a type of movement that soon became a staple ingredient of the court ode. The opening lines of the unremarkable anonymous text, hailing the returning sun and associating it with the monarch, remind us that Louis XIV was not the only self-styled Sun King in Europe!
Begin the Song!

SOPHIE GENT violin 1, SIMON JONES violin 2, REBECCA JONES viola, JONATHAN MANSON viola da gamba
TIMOTHY AMHERST violone, ELIZABETH KENNY theorbo & guitar, JONATHAN COHEN harpsichord & organ

EMMA WALSH, ZOE BROOKSHAW soprano, DAVID ALLSOPP countertenor
SAMUEL BODEN, THOMAS WALKER, NICHOLAS MADDEN tenor, WILLIAM GAUNT, CALLUM THORPE bass

1. Overture
   solo SAMUEL BODEN & tutti

2. Begin the Song! your instruments advance,
   Tune the voice, and tune the flute,
   Touch the silent sleeping lute,
   And make the strings to their own measures dance.
   solo THOMAS WALKER & tutti

3. Bring gentlest thoughts, that into language glide,
   Bring softest words, that into numbers slide:
   Let hand, let every tongue
   To make the noble consort throng.
   Let all in one harmonious note agree
   To frame the mighty song.
   duet SAMUEL BODEN & THOMAS WALKER

4. Hark how the waken’d strings resound,
   And sweetly break the yielding air,
   The ravish’d sense how pleasingly they wound,
   And call the list’ning soul into the ear;
   Each pulse beats time, and every heart
   With tongue and fingers bears a part.
   solo THOMAS WALKER & tutti

5. By harmony’s entrancing power,
   When we are thus wound up to ecstasy,
   Methinks we mount, methinks we tower,
   And seem to leave mortality,
   And seem to antedate our future bliss on high.
   solo THOMAS WALKER & tutti

6. How dull were life, how hardly worth our care!
   But for the charms which music lends!
   How pall’d its pleasures would appear,
   But for the pleasure which our art attends!
   solo THOMAS WALKER

7. Without the sweets of melody
   To tune our vital breath,
   Who would not give it up to death
   And in the silent grave contented lie?
   solo CALLUM THORPE

8. Music’s the cordial of a troubled breast,
   The softest remedy that grief can find;
   The gentle spell that charms our cares to rest,
   And calms the ruffling passions of the mind.
   Music does all our joys refine,
   ‘Tis that gives relish to our wine,
   ‘Tis that gives rapture to our love.
   It wings devotion to a pitch divine;
   ‘Tis our chief bliss on earth, and half our heaven above.
   tutti

9. Come then, with tuneful breath and string,
   The praises of our art let’s sing;
   Let’s sing to blessed Cecilia’s name,
   To blessed Cecilia’s great fame,
   That graced this art, and gave this day its name.
   While music, wine and mirth conspire
   To bear a consort, and make up the choir.
   JOHNNY OLDHAM (1653–1683)

10. Chaconne a 4 in G major
    SOPHIE GENT violin 1, SIMON JONES violin 2, REBECCA JONES viola
    JONATHAN MANSON viola da gamba, BENJAMIN PERROT theorbo, JONATHAN COHEN harpsichord
An Ode on the Death of Mr Henry Purcell

JONATHAN MANSON viola da gamba, ELIZABETH KENNY theorbo
SEBASTIEN MARQ, IAN WILSON recorder, JONATHAN COHEN organ

Mark how the lark and linnet sing;
With rival notes
They strain their warbling throats
To welcome in the spring.

But in the close of night,
When Philomel begins her heavenly lay,
They cease their mutual spite,
Drink in her music with delight,
And list'ning and silent obey.

So ceas’d the rival crew when Purcell came;
They sung no more, or only sung his fame;
Struck dumb, they all admir’d the matchless man,
Alas too soon retir’d, as he too late began.

We beg not hell our Orpheus to restore:
Had he been there,
Their sovereigns’ fear
Had sent him back before.

The power of harmony too well they know:
He long ere this had tun’d the jarring spheres,
And left no hell below.

The heavenly choir, who heard his notes from high,
Let down the scale of music from on high;
They handed him along,
And all the way he taught, and all the way they sung.

Ye brethren of the lyre, and tuneful voice,
Lament his lot; but at your own rejoice.
Now live secure, and linger out your days:
The gods are pleas’d alone with Purcell’s lays,
Nor know to mend their choice.

JOHN DRYDEN (1631–1700)

Ground in G minor

SOPHIE GENT violin 1, SIMON JONES violin 2, REBECCA JONES viola
JONATHAN MANSON viola da gamba, BENJAMIN PERROT theorbo, JONATHAN COHEN organ
The Nymphs of the Wells

**duet SAMUEL BODEN & THOMAS WALKER**

19 The Nymphs of the wells, and the Nymphs of the hills,
Which preside o’er the waters and air,
Depute us to pay the duties of the day,
And to offer their usual care.

**duet EMMA WALSHE & ZOË BROOKSHAW**

20 But here comes a Druid and we must retire:
His reverence owns all the grove.
Hold, he beckons, our stay does require:
The Druid, it seems, our off’ring approves.

**duet WILLIAM GAUNT & SAMUEL BODEN**

21 Blest be this morn, blest be the hand
Which planted in the British land
The royal Oak which this day bears
The full account of twice four years,
This Plant, the noblest of the grove,
Is worthy of the care of Jove.

Be Jove propitious to our Isle,
And bless the air and bless the soil,
Bless on till some may live to see
A thriving Plant, a stately Tree.
Bless till it bears a lofty Head
Does unto branches royal spread.

And the Druids meantime
Shall alternately chime;
They shall yearly compose their high sylvan strains,
Their harps shall be tun’d to the pipes of the plains.

**tutti**

22 We Nymphs of the founts and we of the mounts,
We’ll meet, and will dance to the Druids’ measure;
We will join in a ring and will all dance and sing:
The festival calls for those pleasures.

**ANONYMOUS**

23 Sonata in A major

**SOPHIE GENT violin 1, SIMON JONES violin 2, REBECCA JONES viola**

**JONATHAN MANSON viola da gamba, BENJAMIN PERROT lute, JONATHAN COHEN organ**
Dread Sir, the Prince of Light

THOMAS WALKER, WILLIAM GAUNT & SAMUEL BODEN

Dread Sir, the Prince of Light begins to rise,
Gilding the edges of the eastern skies;
'Tis he has sent us hither with our mirth,
Thus to salute the greatest Prince on earth.
Go, said he, go cheer his royal heart
In loyalty and art,
Let every son of mine go bear his part.

THOMAS WALKER & tutti

Let no disloyal cares his peace destroy,
Go, give him length of days and lasting joy,
And after he has lived and governed long,
Tell him, like me, he shall be ever young,
Forever lusty, juvenile and strong.
His life shall be but one eternal year:
So shall each day a New Year’s Day appear.

SAMUEL BODEN, THOMAS WALKER & WILLIAM GAUNT

This message we bring
To the joy of our King,
From the wise and the learned Apollo;
By the length of his rays
He measures your days,
And more than are past are to follow.
Then laugh we and sing in a cheerfuller strain:
Our Monarch for ever and ever shall reign!

This happy omen of your future state
Your blessings and our joys does antedate
Which to perform there lies a tie on Fate,
A fate not all the stars beneath the pole
Can check, diminish, alter or control:
The stars are subject to your princely soul.

ANONYMOUS
Having originally trained and worked as a chef, British tenor Samuel Boden changed his career path and studied singing under John Wakefield at Trinity Laban Conservatoire. He received numerous awards including the Ricordi Opera Prize and the Derek Butler London Prize as well as awards from the Harold Hyam Wingate Foundation, the Samling Foundation and the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Throughout college and after leaving in 2008, he worked extensively in the UK and internationally with many leading ensembles, including Ex Cathedra, The Gabrieli Consort, The Sixteen and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. He has since become increasingly in demand as a soloist, which has led to a variety of experience, both on the concert platform and on the opera stage, performing music from a wide spectrum of styles and eras. This ranges from Roman laments and Elizabethan lute songs, through to West Side Story for the 50th Anniversary World Tour—however, his grounding in choral music has contributed to his deeper involvement with, and love for, early music.

In current recital programmes Samuel performs lute song repertoire with Paula Chateauneuf, and Britten, Fauré, Debussy and Hahn with harpist Iris Torossian. Samuel’s growing discography encompasses works by Monteverdi, Charpentier, Daniel Purcell, Rameau, Bach and Alec Roth.

Outside of his performance life, Samuel is an extreme sports enthusiast and enjoys snowboarding, rock climbing and downhill mountain biking.
THOMAS Walker

Born in Glasgow, Thomas Walker studied brass at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, where he trained as a tuba player, before taking up singing at the age of 21, going on to study with Ryland Davies at the Royal College of Music, London. Thomas is a busy and in-demand singer across a variety of styles for both staged opera and concert platform work: not only the Baroque, which forms the bedrock of his career, but all the way through Classical and bel canto, to modern works.

Thomas works with opera houses throughout Europe including the Komische Oper Berlin, Stuttgart Oper, Opéra National de Paris and Staatsoper Berlin. His operatic roles have included the title role in Rameau’s *Zoroastre*, Adam in Scarlatti’s *Il Primo Omicidio*, Admeto in Gluck’s *Alceste*, the title role in Rameau’s *Platée*, and Count Almaviva in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* by Rossini.

He also appears regularly as a concert soloist with ensembles including the OAE and Gabrieli Consort, the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra and RIAS Kammerchor Berlin. He has also sung Britten’s *Les Illuminations* and *War Requiem*, Stravinsky’s *Pulcinella* and Tippett’s *A Child of our Time*, and has worked with conductors including Sir Andrew Davis, René Jacobs, Paul McCreesh, Ottavio Dantone and Jeffrey Tate.

When he is not travelling, Thomas greatly enjoys walking, having completed the West Highland Way and with ambitions one day to walk the 500 miles of the Camino de Santiago. He also has a keen interest in politics and is an involved campaigner for social justice.

PHOTO © ROBERT WORKMAN
JONATHAN COHEN

Jonathan Cohen is one of Britain’s finest young musicians. He has forged a remarkable career with notable success as a conductor, cellist and keyboardist. He is well known for his passion and commitment to chamber music which he expands to diverse activities such as Baroque opera and the Classical symphonic repertoire. He is the Artistic Director of Arcangelo, Associate Conductor of Les Arts Florissants, Artistic Director of the Tetbury Music Festival and Artistic Partner of the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra.

Alongside his busy guest conducting career, Jonathan directs his own ensemble Arcangelo with whom he performs regularly throughout Europe at some of the most highly regarded festivals and concert halls. Jonathan and Arcangelo have recorded a wide range of music, from Porpora and Handel to Gluck and Mozart, including albums for Hyperion with singers Iestyn Davies and Christopher Purves, and violinist Alina Ibragimova.

After finishing his studies at Clare College, Cambridge, Jonathan began his career establishing himself as a cellist. He performed as guest principal with many of the UK’s foremost orchestras and ensembles, both symphonic and ‘historical’. With this experience Jonathan developed a unique crossover specialism in the field of early music and an interest in period instruments. He was a founder member of The London Haydn Quartet, and continues to cherish performing chamber music with friends and colleagues.

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Arcangelo

Arcangelo brings together some of the world’s finest musicians who excel on both historical and modern instruments under the direction of their founder, artistic director and conductor Jonathan Cohen. Its players believe that the collaboration required in chamber music is the highest expression of what it means to make music, and Arcangelo attracts an outstanding calibre of performers who already have flourishing solo and chamber music careers. These are performers of dazzling technical ability, but they also have a passion for faithful interpretation that goes far beyond historical understanding.

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Front illustration: *Eva Prima Pandora* by Jean Cousin the Elder (1490–1560).
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