



# Spring

*from Haydn's 'The Seasons'*

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Handel: *Chandos Anthem no. 9*

Britten: *Five Flower Songs*

St Andrew's Church  
8pm, Saturday 17th May, 2008



# Summertown Choral Society

Duncan Saunderson, *conductor*

*with*

Sue Singleton, *soprano*

Stephen Taylor, *counter-tenor*

Adrian Lowe, *tenor*

Tom Edwards, *bass*

*and*

The Summertown Players



**Duncan Saunderson** became the choir's director in 1996. A layclerk in New College Choir, Duncan has wide experience as a choir master and singing teacher, and has sung professionally under some of the finest choral conductors in the country.

**Summertown Choral Society** was founded in 1961. New members are always welcome to this friendly and well-established choir. There is no audition and we offer trial membership. Singing is a natural way of relaxing: there are proven health benefits and it's fun! Rehearsals for our new season start at 7:30 on Thursday, 31st January 2008 at the URC church in Summertown. More information, including details of social activities, choir holiday and past repertoire can be found at [www.summertownchoral.org.uk](http://www.summertownchoral.org.uk), from our brochure 'Singing in Oxford' or by contacting our Chairman on [info@summertownchoral.org.uk](mailto:info@summertownchoral.org.uk) or 01865 768069.

Our next concert includes Brahms's *Ein Deutsches Requiem*. See this programme's back page for further details.

*The three works in tonight's programme are linked, somewhat tenuously, by the origins of each of them. Two of the composers, Handel and Haydn, though not English, had extensive connections with the English musical scene of the 18th century and were very popular with English audiences. The third, Britten, was a true-born 20th century Englishman whose musical ancestry was rooted in another truly English composer of three centuries earlier, Henry Purcell.*

## **Handel: Chandos Anthem no. 9**

**George Frederic Handel** (1685-1759) was born at Halle near Leipzig, the son of an eminent barber-surgeon, and from early in his life showed considerable musical talent. By the age of seven he was an accomplished keyboard player and at nine he had begun composing music. In 1702 he was appointed organist at Halle Cathedral and two years later joined the orchestra of the Hamburg opera. Both here and at Halle he came under the influence of the new Italian style of music, whose popularity had been spreading steadily through northern Europe during the late 17th century, and in 1706 he moved to Italy where he built up a considerable reputation as a keyboard player and composer of Italian opera.

In 1710 Handel returned to Germany to the post of Kapellmeister at the court of the Elector of Hanover, who in 1714 was to become king of England as George I, and in 1712 after a number visits he moved permanently to London, where he secured the patronage first of the Earl of Burlington and then, in 1717 and 1718, of Lord Chandos. In 1720 he accepted a commission for the 'constant supply of (Italian) operas' to the newly founded Royal Academy of Music, but the Academy closed in 1728 and, after several years of artistic and financial failures, aggravated by illness, he turned to a new musical form, the English oratorio, which he developed and which was to establish his enduring popularity and fame as an English composer. In 1727 he was made an English citizen by Act of Parliament.

Lord Chandos amassed substantial wealth as paymaster-general of the Forces Abroad during the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714), and was a generous patron of the arts until he lost much of his fortune in the collapse of the South Sea Company in 1720. In 1714 he acquired a large

estate and Jacobean country house at Cannons in Edgware, Middlesex, which he rebuilt in Baroque and early Palladian style, and it was at the local parish church of St Lawrence, Whitechurch, also rebuilt by Chandos, that the 11 *Chandos Anthems* were first performed. Handel was provided with a band of some 30 musicians and during his two years as house composer he wrote the *Chandos Te Deum*, the masque *Acis and Galatea* and his first English oratorio *Esther*, in addition to the Anthems.

*Anthem no. 9* has eight movements, one for each solo voice in turn and four for chorus alone (though tonight a few bars in the final chorus are sung by a soloist), with an orchestral introduction of 36 bars leading into the first choral movement. The text was probably compiled by Handel himself from a metrical version of the Psalms published in 1696 by Nicholas Brady (Irish cleric) and Nathum Tate (librettist of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*), and the opening words of praise to God colour the musical style of all eight movements. In the four choral movements the solid harmonies suggesting a chorale, in contrast to the flowing melodic lines and successive fugal entries of musical counterpoint, convey almost a sense of dialogue between the four voice parts of the chorus as if to replace a dialogue between soloists and chorus.

## Britten: *Five Flower Songs*

**Benjamin Britten** (1913-1976) was born in Lowestoft. His mother was a gifted amateur musician and he showed his own musical talent early in life, writing music in his childhood. He entered the Royal College of Music in 1930, and his first mature compositions were soon attracting attention. He was an exceptional pianist as a performer of chamber music and as an accompanist, and this led in 1936 to the start of his association with the tenor Peter Pears as musicians and as life partners. Both pacifists, the two left England in 1939 spending the next three years in the United States and Canada. After returning to England in 1942 Britten continued composing, and in 1948 he and Pears together founded the Aldeburgh Festival, originally for the performance of music and as a home for their opera company, the English Opera Group, but soon widened to include literature, drama and painting.

Britten continued writing music until his death. The main influence over his work was the late 16th and 17th century English composers, especially Purcell, and his finest music is generally considered to be his writing for the human voice. His operas, of which he wrote 13, have been described as 'the finest English operas since those of Henry Purcell', and his War Requiem, written in 1961 for the consecration of the new Coventry Cathedral, is on a truly grand scale. In addition to his many songs and other vocal and choral works, his instrumental works include ballets, symphonies, concertos and chamber music, particularly for strings, and, perhaps his most popular work, *Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Purcell* (*The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*).

The song cycle *Five Flower Songs* was written to mark the 25th wedding anniversary in 1950 of two friends. Britten set the first two songs to poems of the Jacobean poet Robert Herrick, the third and fourth to poems by the 18th and 19th century poets George Crabbe and John Clare, and the fifth to an anonymous folk song.

**Herrick** (1591-1674) was for most of his life the faithful country parson of a parish in Devon, though as a royalist he was ousted from it during the Puritan Commonwealth. In 1648 he published a large volume of his poems in *Hesperides: or the Works both Humane and Divine of Robert Herrick Esq.* They included religious verse, but most of them were about nature, the seasons, youth and love.

**Crabbe** (1754-1832), like Britten a Suffolk man born in Aldeburgh, ordained a priest and with a reputation as a naturalist and 'recorder of beetles', published several volumes of poetry depicting village and rural life. Britten used one of these, *The Borough*, as the source of his opera *Peter Grimes*.

**Clare** (1793-1864) 'the peasant poet', son of a Northamptonshire farm labourer, had almost no schooling, and died insane. He bought a copy of James Thomson's *The Seasons* (fortuitous link with Haydn's work?), began to write poetry, and through Thomson came to the notice of London's literary circles. Torn between literary London and his rural roots, he wrote long poems with a rural theme, from the last of which, *Rural Muse*, comes *The Evening Primrose*.

Britten's settings, using varied rhythms, simple two-part writing and four-part dissonances, bring out with marked sensitivity the mood of the poems: the dancing and fading *Daffodils*, the calm and gentle *Four Sweet Months* and *Evening Primrose*, the angular *Marsh Flowers*, and the story-telling *Ballad of Green Broom*.

*Interval of 20 minutes*

## Haydn: *The Seasons – Spring*

**Joseph Haydn** (1732-1809) was born in Rohrau, an Austrian village near its border with Hungary, the son of a wheelwright. Though there was no musical tradition in the family, there was much music-making in family life, and at the age of eight he was enrolled in the choir school of St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna. In 1749 he left the Cathedral choir and for the next 12 years earned his living playing in small orchestras, teaching and writing music. In 1761 he was appointed as Assistant Kapellmeister and in 1766 as Kapellmeister in the household of Prince Nikolaus I, head of the Esterházy family, one of Vienna's richest and most important families, a position which he held until the Prince's death in 1790. His duties required the composition and performance of chamber, orchestral and sacred music, resulting in an enormous volume of work and establishing the four-movement 'sonata' form as the standard structure for a work of classical music.

By 1790 Haydn's reputation as a composer had spread throughout Europe and, since he was now able to travel, he accepted an offer from the impresario J P Saloman to visit England and write and conduct symphonies for the London audience. He made two long visits, the first in 1791-92, when he was awarded a Doctorate of Music at Oxford in 1791, and the second in 1794-95, during which he composed the 12 London Symphonies. After returning to Vienna in 1795 he continued to write music, including his last six masses and his two oratorios *The Creation* and *The Seasons*. In 1802 the onset of an illness forced him to stop composing, but until his death he continued to receive great acclaim and many public honours.

The theme and libretto of *The Seasons* (*Die Jahreszeiten*) present something of a puzzle. In the 18th century oratorios took as their subject matter religious themes, biblical characters of the Old Testament, or heroes of classical mythology, but *The Seasons* depicts the passing of the four seasons of the year. During his visits to London it is at least possible that Haydn came across the work of a Scottish poet James Thomson, born in 1700, who was well known in London circles and died there in 1748, having written the words of *Rule Britannia* and a volume of poetry of inordinate length, published in 1730, entitled *The Seasons*. The libretto of *The Creation*, which was first performed in 1798, had been compiled by a notable Viennese patron of music and of the arts, Baron Gottfried van Swieten, and following its success it seems that van Swieten commissioned a second oratorio from Haydn for which again he compiled the libretto, using the theme of Thomson's work as the basis for his text.

*The Seasons* was first performed in April 1801 and met with success comparable to that which greeted *The Creation*. Its four movements depict the four seasons of the year in a setting of village country life as described by Simon, Lucas and Jane and a chorus of villagers: in *Summer*, the joy of creation, a summer storm followed by rest and tranquillity; in *Autumn*, the blessings of hard work, mutual love, the harvest, the thrill of the hunt, and the joy of merry-making; in *Winter*, a homely scene in a country cottage, welcome to a traveller, and a final hymn to the life hereafter and heavenly bliss after the storms and strife of this mortal life. Following (in this performance) a brief and oddly prescient excerpt from Haydn's *Oxford Symphony*, *Spring* opens with orchestra, soloists and chorus celebrating the departure of winter and the arrival of spring. The farmer goes out to plough and sow the new crop. The villagers pray for a bounteous harvest and sing of the joy of new life, closing with a hymn of thanksgiving and praise to God for the bounty of nature.

*Clive Williams*

# George Frederic Handel: *O praise the Lord*

## Chorus

O praise the Lord with one consent,  
And magnify His Name.  
Let all the servants of the Lord  
His worthy praise proclaim..

## Alto

Praise Him, all ye that in his house  
Attend with constant care,  
With those that to his utmost courts  
With humble zeal repair.

## Tenor

For this our truest int'rest is  
Glad hymns of praise to sing,  
And with loud songs to bless his name,  
A most delightful thing.

## Bass

That God is great, we often have  
By glad experience found,  
And seen how He, with wondrous pow'r,  
Above all gods is crown'd.

## Chorus

With cheerful notes let all the earth  
To heaven their voices raise.  
Let all inspir'd with godly mirth  
Sing solemn hymns with praise.

## Soprano

God's tender mercy knows no bounds,  
His truth shall ne'er decay.  
Then let the willing nations round  
Their grateful tribute pay.

## Chorus

Ye boundless realms of joy,  
Exalt your Maker's fame.  
His praise your song employ  
Above the starry frame.

## Chorus

Your voices raise,  
Ye Cherubim and Seraphim,  
To sing his praise,  
Alleluja! Alleluja!

# Joseph Haydn: *The Seasons – Spring*

## Recitative

SIMON Behold where surly Winter flies!  
Far to the north he passes off.  
He calls his ruffian blasts,  
His ruffian blasts obey  
And quit the howling hill.

LUCAS Behold, from craggy rocks the snows  
In livid torrents melted run!

JANE Forth fly the tepid airs,  
And from the southern shores allure  
The messenger of Spring.

## Chorus

ALL Come, gentle Spring,  
Ethereal mildness, come!  
And from her wintry grave  
Bid drowsy nature rise.

MEN As yet the year is unconfirm'd,  
And oft returning Winter's blast,  
Or black evenom'd fog,  
The bud and bloom destroys.

WOMEN See, gentle Spring delightful comes!  
Her soft and balmy breath we feel,  
The joy of renovated life.  
See, gentle Spring delightful comes!

ALL Come, gentle Spring,  
Ethereal mildness, come!  
And smiling on our plains descend;  
While music wakes around, O come!

## Recitative

SIMON At last the bounteous sun  
From Aries unto Taurus rolls,  
Wide spreading life and heat;

The fleecy clouds uprise sublime,  
And stretch their thin and silver wings  
O'er all surrounding heaven.

## Air

SIMON With joy th'impatient husbandman  
Drives forth his lusty team  
To where the well-us'd plough remains,  
Now loosen'd from the frost.  
With measur'd step he throws the grain  
Within the bounteous earth.

O sun, soft show'rs and dews,  
The golden ears in plenty bring !  
With joy th'impatient husbandman...  
And they their wonted toil begin,  
Made cheerful by a song.

## Recitative

LUCAS Laborious man hath done his part;  
And while his heart with hope expands,

That nature's friendly aid  
Will richly crown his toil,  
His ardent prayers to heaven ascend.

## Trio and Chorus

LUCAS Be propitious, bounteous heaven,  
O'er the hills and vales luxuriant  
Spread a rich autumnal feast!

TRIO The hopes of man shall then be crown'd,  
And songs of joy thy praise shall tell.

CHORUS Be propitious, bounteous heaven, etc.

CHORUS Be propitious, bounteous heaven,  
O'er the hills and vales luxuriant  
Spread a rich autumnal feast!

LUCAS O let the gales of grey-ey'd morning,

SIMON Upon refreshing dewdrops breathing,

JANE The genial sun and ev'ning show'r  
With pow'r productive bless the land!

O let the gales of grey-ey'd morning,  
The genial sun and ev'ning show'r  
With pow'r productive bless the land!  
The hopes of man shall then be crown'd,  
And songs of joy thy praise shall tell.

## Recitative

JANE Our fervent prayers are heard;  
Th'effusive southern breeze  
Warms the wide air  
With fruitful show'rs enriched.

In heaps on heaps the vapours sail;  
And now their genial stores descend,  
Wide spreading o'er the freshen'd world.

## Chorus

JANE Spring, her lovely charms unfolding,  
Calls us to the fields;  
Come, sweet maidens, let us wander  
O'er the fragrant scene.

LUCAS All is lovely, all delightful,  
All replete with joy!

JANE See the playful lambkins bounding!

LUCAS Fish in sport the waters cleaving!

JANE Bees from flow'r to flow'r are flying.

LUCAS Tuneful birds thro' branches flutter.

DUET Spring, her lovely charms unfolding, etc.

CHORUS All is lovely, all delightful,  
All replete with joy!

JANE Let us gaily tread the dewdrops,  
Cull the blooming flow'rs.

CHORUS O what pleasure, what enjoyment,  
Fills our grateful hearts!  
O what gladness, O what rapture,  
Reigns within the breast!

LUCAS See the valleys, see the meadows,  
Where the lilies sip the streamlet!

CHORUS Spring, her lovely charms unfolding,  
Calls us to the fields.  
Let us wander o'er the fragrant scene.  
Spring, her lovely charms unfolding,  
Calls us to the fields.

SIMON Till the feelings, all ecstatic,  
Own a present God.

JANE Mark the mountains! See the waters!  
View the lucid sky!

CHORUS With our praises grateful flowing,  
Magnify His Name!  
Let the voice of pure thanksgiving  
Rise above the clouds!

## Chorus and Trio

CHORUS God of light! God of life!  
Hail, gracious Lord!

CHORUS Endless praise to thee we'll sing,  
Almighty Lord of all.

TRIO From whose abundant stores  
The earth with plenty flows,  
And whose almighty love  
Makes glad the heart of man.  
God of light! God of life!  
Hail, gracious Lord!

God of light! God of life!  
Hail, gracious Lord!  
Endless praise to thee we'll sing,  
Almighty Lord of all.

# Benjamin Britten: *Five Flower Songs*

## *To Daffodils*

Fair daffodils, we weep to see  
You haste away so soon:  
As yet the early rising sun  
Has not attained his noon.

Stay, stay,  
Until the hasting day  
Has run but to evensong;  
And, having prayed together, we  
Will go with you along.

We have short time to stay, as you,  
We have as short a Spring!  
As quick a growth to meet decay,  
As you or any thing.

We die, as your hours do,  
And dry away  
Like to the summer's rain;  
Or as the pearls of morning's dew,  
Ne'er to be found again.

*Robert Herrick*

## *The Succession of the Four Sweet Months*

First, April, she with mellow showers  
Opens the way for early flowers;  
Then after her comes smiling May  
In a more rich and sweet array;  
Next enters June, and brings us more  
Gems than those two that went before;  
Then (lastly,) July comes and she  
More wealth brings in than all those three.  
April! May! June! July!

*Robert Herrick*

## *The Evening Primrose*

When once the sun sinks in the west,  
And dewdrops pearl the evening's breast;  
Almost as pale as moonbeams are,  
Or its companionable star,  
The evening primrose opes anew  
Its delicate blossoms to the dew  
And, hermitlike, shunning the light,  
Wastes its fair bloom upon the night;  
Who, blindfold to its fond caresses,  
Knows not the beauty he possesses.  
Thus it blooms on while night is by;  
When day looks out with open eye,  
'Bashed at the gaze it cannot shun,  
It faints and withers and is gone.

*John Clare*

## *Marsh Flowers*

Here the strong mallow strikes her slimy root,  
Here the dull nightshade hangs her deadly fruit:  
On hills of dust the henbane's faded green,  
And pencil'd flower of sickly scent is seen:  
Here on its wiry stem, in rigid bloom,  
Grows the salt lavender that lacks perfume.  
At the wall's base the fiery nettle springs  
With fruit globose and fierce with poison'd stings,  
In ev'ry chink delights the fern to grow,  
With glossy leaf and tawny bloom below:  
The few dull flowers that o'er the place are spread  
Partake the nature of their fenny bed.  
These, with our seaweeds rolling up and down,  
Form the contracted Flora of our town.

*George Crabbe*

## *Ballad of Green Broom*

There was an old man liv'd out in the wood,  
And his trade was a-cutting of Broom, green Broom,  
He had but one son without thought, without good,  
Who lay in his bed till t'was noon, bright noon.  
The old man awoke one morning and spoke,  
He swore he would fire the room, that room,  
If his John would not rise and open his eyes,  
And away to the wood to cut Broom, green Broom.  
So Johnny arose and slipp'd on his clothes  
And away to the wood to cut Broom, green Broom.

He sharpen'd his knives, and for once he contrives  
To cut a great bundle of Broom, green Broom,  
When Johnny pass'd under a Lady's fine house,  
Pass'd under a Lady's fine room, fine room.  
She call'd to her maid: "Go fetch me," she said,  
Go fetch me the boy that sells Broom, green Broom."  
When Johnny came in to the Lady's fine house  
And stood in the Lady's fine room, fine room,  
"Young Johnny," she said, "will you give up your trade  
And marry a Lady in bloom, full bloom?"  
Johnny gave his consent, and to church they both went,  
And he wedded the Lady in bloom, full bloom.

At market and fair, all folks do declare,  
There's none like the Boy that sold Broom, green Broom.

*Anon.*

our next concert:

**Johannes Brahms:**  
*Ein Deutsches Requiem*

January 2009

*Rehearsals will start Thursday 11 September.  
New members welcome. See our website for more details:*

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