

resonus

Songs of
Elizabeth Maconchy
& Ralph Vaughan Williams
Volume 2

James Geer, Ronald Woodley

Elizabeth Maconchy (1907–94) &
Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)

Songs, Volume 2

James Geer *tenor*
Ronald Woodley *piano*

About James Geer and Ronald Woodley:

‘Experienced partners in exploring 20th-century British repertoire, James Geer and Ronald Woodley specialise in honesty and clarity [...]. [There’s] something valuable in Geer’s agile phrasing and direct attack.’
BBC Music Magazine

‘Vaughan Williams’s cycle ‘Songs of Travel’ is given new buoyancy when sung by a tenor instead of the more usual baritone. Maconchy’s songs, mostly unpublished and some recovered from manuscripts, span 70 years, moving from simple lyric to modernist invention. The dramatic scene ‘Faustus’ (1971) shows Maconchy at the height of her game, giving equal authority to voice and piano, performed with persuasive urgency by Geer and Woodley.’
The Observer

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)

Four Last Songs

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------|
| 1. Procris | [2:36] |
| 2. Tired | [2:15] |
| 3. Hands, Eyes, and Heart | [1:24] |
| 4. Menelaus | [4:16] |

Elizabeth Maconchy (1907–1994)

- | | |
|----------------------|--------|
| 5. The Exequy | [4:28] |
|----------------------|--------|

The Garland

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|----------------------------|--------|
| 6. The Garland | [1:10] |
| 7. Old and Young | [0:47] |
| 8. I Would I Were a Mirror | [1:56] |
| 9. No End to Love | [2:09] |

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|---|--------|
| 10. Sailor’s Song of the Two Balconies | [3:41] |
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| 11. The Disillusion | [3:30] |
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| 12. The Swallow | [1:53] |
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|---------------------------|--------|
| 13. The Poet-Wooer | [2:06] |
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|--------------------------------------|--------|
| 14. Sleep Brings No Joy To Me | [3:36] |
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|------------------------------|--------|
| 15. In Fountain Court | [2:48] |
|------------------------------|--------|

Ralph Vaughan Williams

The House of Life

- | | |
|----------------------|--------|
| 16. Love-Sight | [4:25] |
| 17. Silent Noon | [4:15] |
| 18. Love’s Minstrels | [5:28] |
| 19. Heart’s Haven | [4:12] |
| 20. Death in Love | [4:55] |
| 21. Love’s Last Gift | [4:25] |

Elizabeth Maconchy

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 22. How Samson Bore Away the Gates of Gaza | [10:56] |
| (original version of 1937) | |

Total playing time [77:22]



Ralph and Ursula Vaughan Williams in 1954.
By kind permission of the Vaughan Williams Foundation

Songs by Elizabeth Maconchy & Ralph Vaughan Williams, Volume 2

In Volume One of these two discs, we introduced the ostensibly unlikely pairing of Ralph Vaughan Williams and Elizabeth Maconchy, in the context of their lifelong friendship dating back to Maconchy's student days in the 1920s at the Royal College of Music (RCM). We saw the extent of the older composer's encouragement of Maconchy's quest for an individual, strong but always expressive compositional voice. On her way to the more radical, modernist aesthetic that we associate with her from the post-war period, we heard something of the various stylistic paths that she explored, and how she either engaged with, or distanced herself from, the English musical traditions in which she was an inevitable participant.

In bringing to light many unknown and largely unpublished songs from the Maconchy archive at St Hilda's College, Oxford, a certain irony is discernible. At the time Maconchy was striving to make headway as a composer in the 1920s and 30s, a voice could often be heard within the British music publishing establishment to the effect that no woman composer could expect to have large-scale instrumental or orchestral music published, only at best songs or other

miniatures. Yet in many cases it is Maconchy's songs that have remained in manuscript, and ignored. Indeed, it may be precisely the composer's ambitions for a reputation with larger-scale forces that dissuaded her from publishing some of these songs, often after successful first (or only) performances.

Such ambitions were certainly justifiable. Following Maconchy's highly fruitful period of study in Prague, with Karel Jiráček, during 1929–30, funded by the RCM's Octavia Travelling Scholarship, the 1930s saw Maconchy's star in the ascendant. Despite the practical limitations imposed by her contraction of tuberculosis, which necessitated a move out of London to the Kent countryside, as well as the vicissitudes of acceptance and rejection at the hands of the BBC reading panels, this pre-war period saw the Proms triumph of her orchestral suite *The Land* in August 1930, as well as success with many other works, including the Oboe Quintet of 1933, the first three string quartets, and the broadcast premiere of the Viola Concerto in 1938 (conducted by Constant Lambert, who was, it should be said, no great fan of Maconchy). Her reputation abroad, too, was on the rise, with prominent recognition at the 1935 International Society for Contemporary Music Festival in Prague, and a whole broadcast concert of her music from

Kraków in February 1937, repeated along with her Piano Concerto in Warsaw that same autumn.

It was at just this time, too, that Vaughan Williams first met the poet Ursula Wood, who was to become the composer's second wife in February 1953 following his first wife Adeline's death in May 1951, and after some fifteen years of close, then passionate relationship, which the increasingly ailing Adeline seemed to accept as part of the natural evolution of her husband's life. Right from the start of Ralph and Ursula's correspondence, the exchange and discussion of poetry had been central, and nowhere is the composer's care and intimacy in song writing more apparent than in the four settings of Ursula's poetry eventually published posthumously in 1960 as **Four Last Songs**, presented here, we think for the first time, transposed for tenor voice.

These songs – still perhaps undervalued as the rapt, understated gems that they are – were not composed as the group we now know. There is some evidence from Ursula's later correspondence that the four had been originally intended to form part of two separate song cycles, perhaps all setting her own poetry. But recent research, especially in a valuable 2003

essay by Renée Chérie Clark examining the manuscript material and other archival sources, suggests that, even if this were the case, the division of the songs was not as one might expect.

Rather than the two works on Greek mythological themes, 'Procris' and 'Menelaus', being linked, with the central two, clearly more emotionally personal, forming a second pair, it seems very likely that Vaughan Williams intended 'Menelaus' to be linked instead with 'Hands, Eyes, and Heart'. Indeed, in a letter of 7 March 1955 from the composer to the baritone Keith Falkner, the first interpreter of these two songs, Vaughan Williams describes 'Hands, Eyes, and Heart' as a 'short pendant' to 'Menelaus'. Perhaps, then, despite the eventual published ordering, we should consider them poetically the other way round. The sentiment of the shorter song might then be seen as a kind of comforting epilogue to the more expansive but restrained and unsettled depiction of Menelaus's urge to return to home life in Sparta with his wife Helen after the Trojan War, having been becalmed in the Egyptian harbour of Pharos by the gods' displeasure at his inadequate sacrifice to Zeus. The poem is loosely based on a passage from Book IV of Homer's *Odyssey*, which Ursula and Ralph had been reading aloud to one another in T. E. Lawrence's

translation, spurring the almost simultaneous conception of poem and music. Whether or not it can be read metaphorically for the ageing composer's 'return home' with his second wife, it seems significant that Ursula's original poem *Menelaus on the Beach at Pharos* became part of her collection *Silence and Music*, published in 1959 after Ralph's death, while 'Hands, Eyes, and Heart', forming Part VII of 'Prologue' from her earlier 1941 collection *No Other Choice*, concludes its imagery of deep affection with the line 'as music and silence meet and both are heard.'

The poems set in the first two songs of the group, 'Procris' and 'Tired', had been published in Ursula's 1943 collection *Fall of Leaf*. We have it on her authority that 'Procris' was directly suggested by the late fifteenth-century painting by Piero di Cosimo in the National Gallery now titled *A Satyr Mourning over a Nymph*, but sometimes (and certainly accurately in subject-matter) named *The Death of Procris*. Known mainly through its retelling by Ovid and other later Renaissance writers, the myth tells of the accidental killing of Procris by her husband Cephalus while out hunting, after Procris mistakenly suspects him of infidelity, tracks him down, but is in turn mistaken by Cephalus for a wild animal in the bushes. Just as 'Menelaus' is emotionally paired with 'Hands, Eyes, and

Heart', so one can read the intimate warmth of 'Tired' as a kind of balm to the sense of reflection, regret and mourning that haunts 'Procris', so wonderfully expressed by Vaughan Williams's gently opaque not-quite-modal harmonies, and supple but unquiet, undulating rhythms.

In another coincidence of dates here, at the time Vaughan Williams was working on his *Four Last Songs*, Maconchy composed one of the (literally) unsung little masterpieces of song to have emerged during the research for these recordings. The extraordinarily intense setting of **The Exequy**, dating from 1956, continues the highly expressive but often astringent extensions to tonal vocabulary that we saw already emerging in Volume One of these discs, as Maconchy's career progressed. Not only has this song lain in manuscript since its composition, but there seems to be no record of it ever having been performed. Maconchy here sets lines from the long poem *Exequy on his Wife* by Henry King, Bishop of Chichester (1592–1669), mourning the tragically early death of his wife Anne at the age of twenty-three. A close friend (and executor) of John Donne, King shares in his verse something of the older poet's emotional, religious and metaphorical depth, to which Maconchy responds magnificently, with an insistent tolling accompaniment reminiscent in some ways

of Ravel's *Le Gibet* from *Gaspard de la nuit*.

By contrast, the group of short songs issued under the title **The Garland** offers an attractively lighter side to Maconchy's compositional personality. Originally a set of seven, subtitled 'Variations on a theme' and dating from 1938, these set texts from the ancient Greek collection of lyric poems known as the *Anacreontea*, translated by the composer's husband, William LeFanu. Of the seven, four were eventually published in 1984, and are presented in that grouping here. On our previous disc, we recorded two of the other unpublished songs, linked by their reference to Cupid's antics, and the remaining seventh song, **The Swallow**, although closely linked harmonically and motivically with the published four, we present separately here, to respect Maconchy's desire to see the published grouping retain its own identity. Of these four, the third, 'I Would I Were a Mirror', is notable as a deeply felt, even erotic, exception to the cycle's overall lightness of touch, matched by Maconchy's heady harmonic language, while the text of the final, carefree 'No End to Love' strikes the modern listener as a kind of ancient precursor to Leporello's catalogue aria from *Don Giovanni*.

Two faint but legible pencil scores in the

Maconchy archive have given us the opportunity to re-edit and record a pair of songs that set poems by the composer's friend and contemporary Sheila Wingfield (1906–92). Like Maconchy, Wingfield was of both Irish and English background; she later became Viscountess Powerscourt by marriage, though her life was turbulent, unhappy, and ultimately tragic (see her 2007 biography *Something to Hide*, by Pennyerrick). Although now virtually forgotten, her early poetry from the 1930s and 40s was well received, including by Yeats, Eliot and Betjeman, though her relationship with Yeats soured after she used the encouraging contents of a private letter to help market her work. Both **Sailor's Song of the Two Balconies** and **The Disillusion** appear in Wingfield's first collection of *Poems* from 1938, and Maconchy's settings date from 1941. (There is some evidence that Hinrichsen agreed to publish these, as well as other work by Maconchy, but the project seems to have come to nothing.) Musically they clearly form a pair, with their shared bald juxtapositions of traditionally unrelated chords a semitone apart, and there is a certain bleakness common to both, alleviated only by the warmer, perhaps Hispanic climes evoked in the central section of the 'Sailor's Song'. (In a rare critique of a first performance of her songs,

Maconchy commented to her friend Grace Williams that the soprano Sophie Wyss was unable to make sufficient dramatic contrast between the coldness of the 'northern balcony' and the warmth of the 'southern'.)

Of the final three songs in this main group of Maconchy's work, two return us to the earlier period of the composer's career in the late 1920s, while still a student of Vaughan Williams at the RCM. Both **The Poet-Wooer** from 1928, setting an abbreviated version of Ben Jonson's *My Picture Left in Scotland*, and **In Fountain Court**, from around 1929, setting a poem from the 'Moods and Memories' section of Arthur Symons' *Silhouettes* from 1892, show clearly that while Maconchy was by no means in thrall to her teacher's style at this time (nor would he have wished it so), she was happy on occasions to explore what a more traditional English modal sound world could offer. By contrast, the song placed here between these two, **Sleep Brings No Joy To Me**, from 1937, takes Emily Brontë's already bleak text and turns the screw further, with often grating dissonance and angularity of vocal line, at the end of which the bathos of a pure C major 'death' surely brings little final comfort.

Vaughan Williams's earliest song cycle, **The House of Life**, setting six sonnets from Part

One ('Youth and Change') of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's collection of the same title, is gradually being recognised as a major work, after too many years of relative neglect. Completed in 1903 and premiered the following year along with the *Songs of Travel*, the qualities of the slightly earlier work have often been downplayed as somehow not yet quite fully formed, viewed in hindsight across the composer's later decades. Yet although the Stevenson settings certainly represented a stylistic tipping-point for Vaughan Williams, *The House of Life* contains much wonderful music, rooted more in the continental European models of Schumann, Wagner, and perhaps Duparc. Even if the characteristically overwrought, extravagant Pre-Raphaelite imagery and wordplay of Rossetti's verse invite music on a broader and richer canvas than *Songs of Travel*, there is still a true intimacy and honesty about many of the songs – and not only the justly famous 'Silent Noon'. There may be no real narrative arc to the cycle, but it nevertheless seems to share with its younger sibling the composer's belief in the power of music, especially song, to move beyond the purely subjective towards a more communitarian, natural expression of love and life.

It must be admitted that Maconchy's 1937 scena for voice and piano, **How Samson**

Bore Away the Gates of Gaza, is something of a curiosity. The American poet Vachel Lindsay (1879–1931) was for a brief time highly respected for his innovative, modernist writings, experimental use of sound and language, and for his own extravagant, highly theatrical staged readings. But although he gained some reputation for a well-intentioned support of Afro-American culture, he was later critically disowned for perpetuating the obnoxious stigma of the ‘black savage’. His 1917 poem on Samson, subtitled ‘A Negro Sermon’, is an eccentric, kitsch, and in places barely coherent re-telling of the biblical narrative of the Old Testament Nazarite strong-man judge, enjoining the listener/congregation to contemplate with evangelical fervour Samson’s fate, for its parallels with Christ’s life. Maconchy’s extended, dramatic setting deliberately plays with certain parodic Middle Eastern harmonic clichés of the period, and seems not to take itself entirely seriously. Nevertheless, the composer obviously retained a fondness for the score, as she returned to it several times in later years to produce new orchestrated versions with soloist (1938), for chorus and orchestra (1963–4), and even for chorus and brass band (1973).

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Elizabeth Maconchy and William LeFanu in the USA, 1974.
By kind permission of Nicola LeFanu

Texts

Four Last Songs

1. Procris

Procris is lying at the waterside,
the yellow flowers show spring, the grass is green,
before a gentle wind the thin trees lean
towards the rushes, the rushes to the tide.
She will not see
the green spring turn to summer, summer go
in a long golden dusk towards the snow,
with eyes so lit by love that everything
burned, flowered, grew, blossomed, moved on foot or wing
with the guessed rhythm of eternity.
All her hope and will
flowed from her unavailing
and she knew darkness, as her eyes know now
shut to the daylight, and despair prevailing
she saw no way to go.

2. Tired

Sleep, and I'll be still as another sleeper
holding you in my arms, glad that you lie
so near at last.
This sheltering midnight is our meeting place,
no passion or despair or hope divide
me from your side.
I shall remember firelight on your sleeping face,
I shall remember shadows growing deeper
as the fire fell to ashes and the minutes passed.

3. Hands, Eyes, and Heart

Hands, give him all the measure of my love
surer than any word.
Eyes, be deep pools of truth, where he may see
a thought more whole than constancy.
Heart, in his keeping, be at rest and live
as music and silence meet, and both are heard.

4. Menelaus

You will come home, not to the home you knew
that your thought remembers, going from rose to rose
along the terraces and staying to gaze
at the vines and reeds and iris beside the lake
in the morning haze.

Forgetting the place you are in
where the cold sea-winds go
crying like gulls on the beach
where the horned sea poppies grow.

Homesick wanderer, you will come home
to a home more ancient, waiting your return:
sea frets the steps that lie green under waves
and swallows nest below lintel and eaves:
there lamps are kindled for you, they will burn
till you come, however late you come,
till the west wind's sheltering wing
folds round your sail and brings you to land.

Stretch out your hand,
murmuring, lapping sea and the lamps and the welcome wait
to draw you home to rest.
You shall come home and love shall fold you in joy
and lay your heart on her breast.

*Ursula Vaughan Williams (1911–2007), reprinted with
kind permission from The Complete Poems of Ursula
Vaughan Williams, ed. Stephen Connock (Albion
Music Ltd., 2003).*

5. The Exequy

Sleep on, my Love, in thy cold bed
Never to be disquieted!
My last good-night! Thou wilt not wake
Till I thy fate shall overtake:
Till age, or grief, or sickness must
Marry my body to that dust
It so much loves; and fill the room
My heart keeps empty in that tomb.
Stay for me there: I will not fail

To meet thee in that hollow vale.
And think not much of my delay:
I am already on the way,
And follow thee with all the speed
Desire can make, or sorrows breed.
Sleep on, my Love.

*Henry King, Bishop of Chichester (1592–1669), lines
from Exequy on his Wife c.1624)*

The Garland

6. The Garland

When I was weaving a garland once
I found Love in the roses.
And taking him by the wings
I dipped him into the wine and drank it.
And now he tickles me inside with his wings.

7. Old and Young

I like an old man merry
I like an old man to dance.
But when an old man dances
He's old in the hair
He's young in the head.

8. I Would I Were a Mirror

I would I were a mirror
that you should gaze on me;
I would I were a garment
that you should wear me;
I'd turn me into water
to wash your skin.
Girl, I'd be your oil
and should anoint you.
The ribbon at your breast,
the pearl at your throat;
I would be your sandal
and you tread only me.

9. No End to Love

If you know how to tell
all the leaves of the trees,
If you know how to tell
the waves of all the sea,
I will ask you alone
to count my loves.

First put twenty loves from Athens,
and fifteen more;
Then a string of loves from Corinth,
Achaean girls are fair;
Then count me – out of Lesbos,
Ionia, Caria, Rhodes –
two thousand loves.

What do you say? No end to loves?
I have not told the Syrians yet,
I have not told Canopus' loves,
Or all the loves of Crete
and love is worshipped there.

What? Shall I number you those
from beyond the Straits,
From Parthia, from India?
Loves of my soul.

Anon, Anacreontea, trans. William LeFanu (1904–95)

10. Sailor's Song of the Two Balconies

Sheila Wingfield (1906–92), from Poems (1938)

11. The Disillusion

Sheila Wingfield (1906–92), from Poems (1938)

12. The Swallow

Dear Swallow,
You come every year –
In Summer you build your nest,
In Winter you go out of sight
To the Nile and Africa.

But Love builds his nest in my heart
all the time.

And one Desire is on the wing,
And one is still an egg,
And one is half-hatched.

There's always a chatter
from the little birds.
The larger Loves feed the small,
And as soon as they're grown
They have others in turn.

What can I do?
I have not the courage
To fight against so many Loves.

Anon, Anacreontea, trans. William LeFanu (1904–95)

13. The Poet-Wooer

I now think Love is rather deaf than blind,
For else it could not be
That she,
Whom I adore so much, should so slight me,
And cast my suit behind.
I'm sure my language to her was as sweet,
And ev'ry close did meet
In sentence of as subtle feet
As hath the youngest He
That sits in shadows of Apollo's tree.

Oh, but my conscious fears,
That fly my thoughts between,
Tell me that she hath seen
My hundreds of gray hairs,
Told seven and forty years,
And all these, through her eyes, have stopt her ears.

*Adapted from Ben Jonson (1572–1637),
My Picture Left in Scotland.*

14. Sleep Brings No Joy To Me

Sleep brings no joy to me,
Remembrance never dies,
My soul is given to mystery,
And lives in sighs.

Sleep brings no rest to me;
The shadows of the dead,
My wakening eyes may never see,
Surround my bed.

Sleep brings no strength to me,
No power renewed to brave;
I only sail a wilder sea,
A darker wave.

Sleep brings no wish to fret
My harassed heart beneath;
My only wish is to forget
In endless sleep of death.

Emily Brontë (1818–48) [abbreviated]

15. In Fountain Court

The fountain murmuring of sleep,
A drowsy tune;
The flickering green of leaves that keep
The light of June;
Peace, through a slumbering afternoon,
The peace of June.

A waiting ghost, in the blue sky,
The white curved moon;
June, hushed and breathless, waits, and I
Wait too, with June;
Come, through the lingering afternoon,
Soon, love, come soon.

Arthur Symons (1865–1945), from Silhouettes (1892)

The House of Life

16. Love-Sight

When do I see thee most, beloved one?
When in the light the spirits of mine eyes
Before thy face, their altar, solemnize
The worship of that Love through thee made known?
Or when in the dusk hours, (we two alone)
Close-kissed and eloquent of still replies
Thy twilight-hidden glimmering visage lies,
And my soul only sees thy soul its own?

O love, my love! if I no more should see
Thyself, nor on the earth the shadow of thee,
Nor image of thine eyes in any spring, –
How then should sound upon Life's darkening slope
The ground-whirl of the perished leaves of Hope
The wind of Death's imperishable wing?

17. Silent Noon

Your hands lie open in the long fresh grass, –
The finger-points look through like rosy blooms:
Your eyes smile peace. The pasture gleams and glooms
'Neath billowing skies that scatter and amass.
All round our nest, far as the eye can pass,
Are golden kingcup fields with silver edge
Where the cow-parsley skirts the hawthorn-hedge.
'Tis visible silence, still as the hour-glass.

Deep in the sun-searched growths the dragon-fly
Hangs like a blue thread loosened from the sky: –
So this wing'd hour is dropt to us from above.
Oh! clasp we to our hearts, for deathless dower,
This close-companioned inarticulate hour
When twofold silence was the song of love.

18. Love's Minstrels [Passion and Worship]

One flame-winged brought a white-winged harp-player
Even where my lady and I lay all alone;
Saying: 'Behold this minstrel is unknown;
Bid him depart, for I am minstrel here:
Only my songs [strains] are to Love's dear ones dear.'
Then said I: 'Through thine hautboy's rapturous tone
Unto my lady still this harp makes moan,
And still she deems the cadence deep and clear.'

Then said my lady: 'Thou art Passion of Love,
And this Love's Worship: both he plights to me.
Thy mastering music walks the sunlit sea:
But where wan water trembles in the grove,
And the wan moon is all the light thereof,
This harp still makes my name its voluntary.'



Photography: David Myers

19. Heart's Haven

Sometimes she is a child within mine arms,
Covering beneath dark wings that love must chase, –
With still tears showering and averted face,
Inexplicably filled with faint alarms:
And oft from mine own spirit's hurtling harms
I crave the refuge of her deep embrace, –
Against all ills the fortified strong place
And sweet reserve of sovereign counter-charms.

And Love, our light at night and shade at noon,
Lulls us to rest with songs, and turns away
All shafts of shelterless tumultuous day.
Like the moon's growth, his face gleams through his tune;
And as soft waters warble to the moon,
Our answering spirits chime one roundelay.

20. Death in Love

There came an image in Life's retinue
That had Love's wings and bore his gonfalon:
Fair was the web, and nobly wrought thereon,
O soul-sequestered face, thy form and hue!
Bewildering sounds, such as Spring wakens to,
Shook in its folds; and through my heart its power
Sped trackless as the immemorable hour
When birth's dark portal groaned and all was new.

But a veiled woman followed, and she caught
The banner round its staff, to furl and cling, –
Then plucked a feather from the bearer's wing,
And held it to his lips that stirred it not,
And said to me, 'Behold, there is no breath:
I and this Love are one, and I am Death.'

21. Love's Last Gift

Love to his singer held a glistening leaf,
And said: 'The rose-tree and the apple-tree
Have fruits to vaunt or flowers to lure the bee;
And golden shafts are in the feathered sheaf

Of the great harvest-marshal, the year's chief,
Victorious Summer; aye, and 'neath warm sea
Strange secret grasses lurk inviolably
Between the filtering channels of sunk reef.

All are my blooms; and all sweet blooms of love
To thee I gave while Spring and Summer sang;
But Autumn stops to listen, with some pang
From those worse things the wind is moaning of.
Only this laurel dreads no winter days:
Take my last gift; thy heart hath sung my praise.'

*Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–82),
from The House of Life, Part 1: Youth and Change*

22. How Samson Bore Away the Gates of Gaza

Once, in a night as black as ink,
She drove him out when he would not drink.
Round the house there were men in wait
Asleep in rows by the Gaza gate.
But the Holy Spirit was in this man.
Like a gentle wind he crept and ran.
(‘It is midnight,’ said the big town clock.)

He lifted the gates up, post and lock.
The hole in the wall was high and wide
When he bore away old Gaza's pride
Into the deep of the night:
The bold Jack-Johnson Israelite –
Samson, the Judge, the Nazirite.

The air was black, like the smoke of a dragon.
Samson's heart was as big as a wagon.
He sang like a shining golden fountain;
He sweated up to the top of the mountain.
He threw down the gates with a noise like judgment.
And the quails all ran with the big amusement.

But he wept: 'I must not love tough queens,
And spend on them my hard-earned means.
I told that girl I would drink no more.
Therefore she drove me from her door.

Oh, sorrow,
Sorrow,
I cannot hide!
O Lord, look down from your chariot side!
You made me Judge, and I am not wise;
I am weak as a sheep for all my size.'

*Let Samson
Be coming
Into your mind.*

The moon shone out, the stars were gay –
He saw the foxes run and play.
He rent his garments, he rolled around
In deep repentance on the ground.

Then he felt a honey in his soul;
Grace abounding made him whole.
Then he saw the Lord in a chariot blue.
The gorgeous stallions whinnied and flew;
The iron wheels hummed an old hymn-tune
And crunched in thunder over the moon.
And Samson shouted to the sky:
'My Lord, my Lord is riding high.'
Like a steed, he pawed the gates with his hoof:
He rattled the gates like rocks on the roof,
And danced in the night
On the mountain-top,
Danced in the deep of the night –
The Judge, the holy Nazarite,
Whom ropes and chains could never bind.

*[Let Samson
Be coming
Into your mind.]*

Whirling his arms, like a top he sped;
His long black hair flew round his head
Like an outstretched net of silky cord,
Like a wheel of the chariot of the Lord.

*Let Samson
Be coming
Into your mind.*

Samson saw the sun anew.
He left the gates in the grass and dew.
He went to a country- [county]-seat a-nigh,
Found a harlot proud and high,
Philistine that no man could tame –
Delilah was her lady-name.
Oh, sorrow,
Sorrow –
She was too wise!
She cut off his hair,
She put out his eyes.

*Let Samson
Be coming
Into your mind.*

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay (1879–1931)



James Geer (tenor)

James Geer was educated at Magdalen College, Oxford, as Academical Clerk in the College choir. He continued his training at Trinity College of Music, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (now Royal Conservatoire of Scotland) where he was a scholar on the opera course. James is a Samling Scholar and a Britten-Pears Young Artist. He has appeared as a soloist at many major UK venues, including the Royal Festival Hall, Usher Hall, Wigmore Hall, Snape Maltings, Royal Albert Hall, and St John's Smith Square. He has performed at the Edinburgh International, Aldeburgh and Three Choirs Festivals, and has sung with the London Philharmonic, Bournemouth Symphony, Royal Scottish National, BBC Scottish Symphony and the Philharmonia orchestras and the London Handel Players.

For ten years James was a member of the Glyndebourne chorus; he now sings in the Extra Chorus at Royal Opera House Covent Garden. He is also a member of the Academy of Ancient Music and a regular guest performer with Capella Cracoviensis in Poland. On the opera stage James has performed numerous lead and comprimario roles with Silent Opera, Britten-Pears Opera, Bury Court Opera, Bampton Opera,

Caledonian Opera, and Haddo House Opera. He regularly covers roles for Glyndebourne, Glyndebourne on Tour, Scottish Opera and Music Theatre Wales.

Together with Ronald Woodley, James has given over forty recitals, performing works by, among others, Schubert, Schumann, Britten, Poulenc, Grieg and Sibelius. In 2019 they released an album of songs by Holst, with premiere recordings of works by Joseph Holbrooke, for EM Records; in 2020 an album *Façades*, including songs by William Walton and Constant Lambert, for SOMM (one of *MusicWeb International* Recordings of the Year, 2020), and in 2021 *Dreams Melting*, also for SOMM, including songs by Finzi, Clarke, Ferguson, Maconchy, and Tate. James has also recorded Britten's *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente* with Malcolm Martineau (Onyx).

Ronald Woodley (piano)

Ronald Woodley enjoys a wide-ranging career as clarinetist, chamber pianist and musicologist, bringing the research experience of a distinguished academic portfolio to his varied performance projects. Appointed Professor of Music at the (now Royal) Birmingham Conservatoire in 2004, he was Director of Research there from 2010 to 2015 and previously held academic positions at the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM), the Universities of Lancaster, Newcastle, Liverpool, and Christ Church, Oxford. He is now Emeritus Professor of Music at the RBC, having retired in 2018 to concentrate on recording and research projects.

As a performer Ron trained as clarinetist at the RNCM, before completing a doctorate in musicology at Keble College, Oxford. He is the dedicatee of many new works by Christopher Fox, Roger Marsh, Liz Johnson, Stephen Pratt, James Wishart, and Steve Ingham, including an exciting series of bass clarinet duos in the 1990s in partnership with Roger Heaton. He has recorded works for bass clarinet by York Bowen and Josef Holbrooke with the Primrose Quartet (Meridian Records, 2016) and in 2017 premiered and recorded the newly commissioned *Sea-change* by Liz Johnson,

for multiple clarinets and string quartet, with the Fitzwilliam Quartet (Métier).

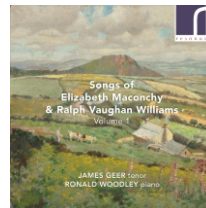
As a musicologist he has an international reputation as a specialist in late medieval music theory, in particular the fifteenth-century musician Johannes Tinctoris. Other projects in nineteenth- and twentieth-century musicology have included work on Ravel, Prokofiev, Steve Reich, George Antheil, and, most recently, early recordings of Lieder and pianists in the circles of Brahms and Clara Schumann, especially Ilona Eibenschütz.

Ron enjoys long-standing partnerships with the tenor James Geer, with whom he has recorded four previous CDs of British song (see above), and with the pianist Andrew West, with whom he has recorded Constant Lambert's four-hand version of Walton's *Façade* Suites, with Lambert's *Trois pièces nègres pour les touches blanches*. In 2023 Ron and Andrew will be recording a new disc of twentieth-century and newly commissioned British music for clarinet, basset horn, bass clarinet and piano.



James Geer (right); Ronald Woodley (centre);
Andrew Hallifax, producer & engineer (left)

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