

PARTHENIA

Rosamund Morley, treble viol
Lawrence Lipnik, tenor viol, recorders
Beverly Au, bass viol
Lisa Terry, tenor and bass viol
with
Arnie Tanimoto, bass viol

Cody Bowers, countertenor

A RELIQUARY *for* WILLIAM BLAKE The Music of Will Ayton for Viols and Voice

A Reliquary for William Blake Poems by William Blake (1757-1827)
Music by Will Ayton (b. 1948)

The Tyger
The Principle, Application & Therefore
Garden of Love
The Remembrance of Sin
Meditation
Come Hither
The Little Vagabond
The Look of Love
The Clod & the Pebble
Grown Old in Love
Why was Cupid a Boy?
Dance – Prayer – Dance
Principle – Argument – Fancy
Piping Down the Valleys Wild

INTERMISSION

Winter Solstice Song
Meditation for Solo Viol
Beverly Au, bass viol

Thrice Tosse Those Oaken Ashes Poem by Thomas Campion (1567-1620)
Music by Will Ayton

Fantasia on a Theme of Henry Purcell

From **Songs of the British Isles**

The Milking Song *Song from the Isle of Man*
Young Edwin in the Lowlands Low *English folk song*
The Standing Stone *Song of the Orkney Isles*
The Berryfields of Blair *A Tinkers' song*

The Ballad of the Rosemary Text by Phyllis McGinley (1905-1978)

Friday, May 6, 2022 at 7:30pm
The Church of Saint Luke in the Fields, New York City

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

This collection of the music of Will Ayton represents some of his efforts to “put new wine into old bottles.” From a biblical sense this is not supposed to work. However, the beauty of the viola da gamba’s sound (the “old bottle”) recommends itself to music well beyond the viol’s historical period (the “new wine”). This selection of music also represents some of Will Ayton’s passions: folk music, Elizabethan poetry, his Celtic heritage, his love of stories, his devotion to the art of polyphony, and his preoccupation with the philosophical and the spiritual.

William Blake (1757-1827) was a poet, painter, visionary mystic and engraver. His multifaceted work has been a constant source of contemplation, fascination, and even bewilderment for those who view his paintings and prints as well as those who read the narrative of his visions. A Reliquary for William Blake, commissioned by Edward Truettner, is another homage, a deep reverent bow to an artist, a humanist, and a mystic — a man of many dimensions. Using Blake’s song lyrics and selections from his prose, these pieces attempt to musically illustrate his philosophical and spiritual credo, his view of institutionalized religion and its impositions, his understanding of human love, and finally, his own role as the perennial scribe and witness of life.

The Tyger (Songs of Experience), perhaps the most famous of his poems, begins this cycle of songs and exemplifies the way that Blake embraced the unity of the divine and the mundane along with the contrasts found in creation. Several of Blake’s works reflect his disillusionment with the church. In The Garden of Love (Songs of Experience), Blake hints at what the church had been and what it had become. Along these lines, in Come Hither (Lacedemonian Instruction), Blake demonstrates his taste for the sardonic and tongue in cheek as he pokes fun at the efforts of theologians, and in The Little Vagabond (Songs of Experience), he proposes a solution to the dreary and tedious self-mortification of church services.

Blake also repeatedly contemplates the dimensions of love. In The Clod and the Pebble (Songs of Experience), he searches for the very nature of love and what it is to love. As with so many of his observations, he presents what is apparent and what is not apparent, and leaves it up to us to decide which is true. Grown Old (Satiric Verses & Epigrams) is a strange, fragmentary comment on Blake’s experience in love. Its meaning is perhaps an enigma. Love, both human and divine, was one of Blake’s preoccupations. His view of human love was, as with many other aspects of life’s experience, penetrating and insightful, as seen in The Look of Love (Several Questions Answered).

Ayton has set some of Blake’s texts in spoken recitative form. In The Principle, Application & Therefore (Principle: All Religions are One, Application & Therefore: There is No Natural Religion), Blake’s three short texts expound the foundation of his spiritual credo, the unity of man and the divine. The Remembrance of Sin (Jerusalem, Chapter 2) reveals that for Blake, spirituality was clearly something more than a ledger-keeping of man’s sin, on a cosmic level as well as on the level of human relationships. Indeed, the very concept of sin was in doubt in his way of thinking. And in Principle — Argument — Fancy (Principle: All Religions are One, Argument: There is No Natural Religion, Fancy: A Memorable Fancy), Blake shows us that there are other ways of thinking than the method of Descartes and Newton. Indeed, his “immense world of delight” which lies beyond our “senses five” seems to enter the realm of modern theoretical physics with its multidimensional universe. He tries to tell us that there is indeed more than “that which meets the eye.”

But Blake is not all serious and otherworldly. In his song Why was Cupid a Boy? (Songs & Ballads), Blake combines his usual penetrating observation with a good dose of ironic humor. This text often causes one to smile both with humor and, if one has lived and loved enough, with understanding and empathy. And in the last song of this cycle, Piping Down the Valleys Wild (Songs of Innocence), Blake tells us who he himself is: the piper, the singer, and the eternal scribe. In every age there are those who distill the infinite into a form that we might hear, sing, and read. Their music is always there for us, we just need to listen.

Winter Solstice Song is taken from a set of four pieces called *Incantations for the Solar Year*. These *Incantations* are reflections of Ayton’s hereditary legacy. They are in the “flavor” of Celtic music, but use no intentionally borrowed material. In *A Meditation for Bass Viol*, the performer is asked to own the piece and to play it “freely,” expressive of the inner journey.

The Ayton setting of a song text by Thomas Campion (1567-1620) closely marry new musical material to the word, allowing it to govern and be the master of the musical movement. Thomas Campion is often overshadowed in his role as a poet by a galaxy of Elizabethan literary giants, but he stands forth as a master of the relationship between sound and the word. These are best seen in his lute songs. Campion creates a sympathetic vibration between the word and the psychology carried by his masterful melodies and harmonic flow. These poems are more than just song lyrics and so their ability to generate new melodies and new harmonies seems unlimited.

Fantasia on a Theme of Henry Purcell reflects the legacy of Purcell's great respect for the viola da gamba and for the art of polyphony. Every viol player must one day enter the world of Purcell's fantasias and will, with few exceptions, come away moved by the wonder of their invention. The defining characteristic of Ayton's fantasia is the contrapuntal texture, but the polyphonic flow is often interrupted by a variety of other contrasting sections within this one-movement form.

The four pieces from Ayton's Songs of the British Isles are new settings of actual folksong tunes from the Celtic

tradition of the British Isles and are drawn from a larger collection, Settings of Songs of the British Isles.

Ballad of the Rosemary, with text by Phyllis McGinley, was commissioned by Mary Benton for the Engelchor Consort of Princeton, New Jersey. Scored for three viols, recorder, and voice, *Ballad of the Rosemary* is a touching story proving that new inspiration can still be generated by the Christmas tradition.

~ Will Ayton

TEXTS

The Tyger

Tyger! Tyger! Burning bright / In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye, / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?
In what distant deeps or skies / Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire? / What the hand, dare seize the fire?
And what shoulder, and what art, / Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat, / What dread hand? and what dread feet? What the hammer? What the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? What dread grasp, / Dare its deadly terrors clasp!
When the stars threw down their spears / And water'd heaven with their tears: Did he smile his work to see? / Did he who made the
Lamb make thee? Tyger! Tyger! Burning bright / In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye, / Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

The Principle, Application & Therefore

The Principle: That the Poetic Genius is the true Man and that the body or outward form of Man is derived from the Poetic Genius. Likewise that the forms of all things are derived from their Genius, which by the Ancients was call'd an Angel and Spirit and Demon.
Application: He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God. He who sees the Ratio only sees himself only.
Therefore: God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is.

The Garden of Love

I went to the Garden of Love, / And saw what I never had seen:
A Chapel was built in the midst, / Where I used to play on the green.
And the gates of the Chapel were shut, / And Thou shalt not. writ o'r the door;
So I turn'd to the Garden of Love, / That so many sweet flowers bore.
And I saw it was filled with graves, / And tombstones where flowers should be:
And Priests in black gowns, were walking their rounds, / And binding with briars, my joys and desires.

The Remembrance of Sin

Come O thou Lamb of God and take away the remembrance of Sin. To record the Sin for a reproach: to let the Sun go down
In a remembrance of the Sin: is a Woe and a Horror!
A brooder of an Evil Day and a Sun rising in blood.
Come then O Lamb of God and take away the remembrance of Sin.

Come Hither

Come hither my boy, tell me what thou seest there. A fool tangled in a religious snare.

The Little Vagabond

Mother, dear Mother, the Church is cold, / But the Alehouse is healthy pleasant and warm;
Besides I can tell where I am use'd well, / Such usage in Heaven will never do well.
But, if at the Church they would give us some Ale, / And a pleasant fire, our souls to regale;
We'd sing and we'd pray, all the livelong day; / Nor ever once wish from the Church to stray,
Then the Parson might preach and drink and sing, / And we'd be as happy as birds in the spring:
And modest dame Lurch, who is always at Church, / Would not have bandy children nor fasting nor birch. And God like a father
rejoicing to see, / His children as happy as he:
Would have no more quarrel with the Devil or barrel / But kiss him and give him both drink and apparel.

The Look of Love

The look of love alarms / Because tis filld with fire But the look of soft deceit / Shall Win the lovers hire.

The Clod and the Pebble

Love seeketh not Itself to please, / Nor for itself hath any care;
But for another gives its ease, / And builds a Heav'n in Hell's despair. So sang a little Clod of Clay, / Trodden with the cattles feet:
But a Pebble of the brook, / Warbled out these metres meet.
Love seeketh only Self to please, / To bind another to Its delight: Joys in anothers loss of ease, / And builds a Hell in Heav'ns despite.

Grown Old

Grown old in Love from Seven till Seven times Seven I oft have wished for Hell for Ease from Heaven.

Why was Cupid a Boy?

Why was Cupid a boy / And why a boy was he
He should have been a Girl / For ought that I can see.
For he shoots with his bow / And the Girl shoots with her Eye
And both are merry and glad / And laugh when we do cry.
And to make Cupid a Boy / Was the Cupid Girls mocking plan
For a boy can't interpret the thing / Till he is become a man.
And then he's so piercd with care / And wounded with arrowy smarts That the whole business of life / Is to pick out the heads of the
darts. Twas the Greeks love of war / Turnd Love into a Boy
And Woman into a Statue of Stone / And away fled every Joy.

Principle – Argument – Fancy

The Principle: No man can think write or speak from his heart, but he must intend truth.

The Argument: Man's perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception.

Fancy: How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way,
Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?

Piping Down the Valleys Wild

Piping down the valleys wild / Piping songs of pleasant glee On a cloud I saw a child, / And he laughing said to me:
Pipe a song about a Lamb; / So I piped with merry chear, Piper pipe that song again / So I piped, he wept to hear.
Drop thy pipe thy happy pipe / Sing thy songs of happy chear. So I sung the same again / While he wept with joy to hear. Piper sit thee
down and write / In a book that all may read. So he vanish'd from my sight. / And I pluck'd a hollow reed. And I made a rural pen, /
And I stain'd the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs / Every child may joy to hear.

Thrice Tosse Those Oaken Ashes

Thrice toss those oaken ashes in the ayer, / And thrice three times tye up this true-lovs knott; Thrice sitt you downe in this enchanted
chaire / And murmure softe, Shee will or she will not. Goe burne those poysoned weeds in that blew fyre, / This Cypress gathered out
a dead mans grave, These Scrotch-owles fethers and the prickling byer / That all thy thronye cares an end may have. Then come you
fairyes, daunce with mee a round, / Daunce in a Circle, let my Love be Center, Melodiously breath an enchanted sound, / Melt her hard
harte, that some remorse may enter.

In vayne are all the Charmes I can devise; / She hath an arte to breake them with her eyes.

—Thomas Campion

The Ballad of the Rosemary

Rosemary, lily, lilac tree, / Kind in the dooryards thrive all three, / But kindest of them is the Rosemary.
When Mary rode to Egypt / Who bore the Christmas King,
Flowers along the wayside / Began blossoming.
To fill His path with fragrances / The lilac lifted up
Her proud and plummy branches, / The lily spread her cup.
And only the green rosemary, / Born petal-less and mild,
Grieved that it owned no benison / Of sweetness for the Child.
The evening fell in perfume, / In perfume rose the day.
Said Mary, "Out of weariness / We'll make a moment's stay.
Beside this running river, / Here where the willows lean,
I'll set the baby sleeping / And wash his garments clean."
But when the clothes were wholesomer, / Where could she hang them all?
"The lily breaks beneath them, / The lilac stands too tall."
So on the trembling rosemary / She laid them one by one,
And strong the rosemary held them / All morning to the sun.

“I thank you, gentle Rosemary. Henceforward you shall bear
Blue clusters for remembrance / Of this blue cloak I wear;
And not your blossoms only, / I give you as reward,
But where His raiment clung to you / Which clad the little Lord,
All shall be aromatic,” / Said Mary, “for I bless / Leaf, stem and flower
That from this hour / Shall smell of holiness.”

Rosemary, lily, lilac tree, / Sweet in the doorways thrive all three, / But sweetest of them is Rosemary.

~ Phyllis McGinley

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

The viol quartet PARTHENIA brings early music into the present with its repertoire that animates ancient and fresh-commissioned contemporary works with a ravishing sound and a remarkable sense of ensemble. These “local early-music stars,” hailed by *The New Yorker* and music critics throughout the world, are “one of the brightest lights in New York’s early-music scene.” Parthenia is presented in concerts across America, and produces its own series in New York City, collaborating regularly with the world’s foremost early music specialists. The quartet has been featured in prestigious festivals and series as wide-ranging as Music Before 1800, the Harriman-Jewell Series, Maverick Concerts, the Regensburg Tage Alter Musik, the Shalin Liu Performing Arts Center, the Pierpont Morgan Library, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Yale Center for British Art, Columbia University’s Miller Theatre, and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. Parthenia’s most recent tour was to Venice, Italy, with soprano Sherezade Panthaki, to perform at The Brooklyn Rail’s collateral event at the 2019 Venice Biennale. Parthenia’s repertoire ranges from the golden age of the viol in Elizabethan England, to the complete viol fantasies of Henry Purcell, to *Al Naharot Bavel* which features works by Jewish Renaissance composers, and the ensemble commissions and premieres new works regularly.

Parthenia has recorded *As it Fell on a Holy Eve - Music for an Elizabethan Christmas*, with soprano Julianne Baird, *Les Amours de Mai*, with Ms. Baird and violinist Robert Mealy, *A Reliquary for William Blake*, *Within the Labyrinth*, and *The Flaming Fire*, with vocalist Ryland Angel and keyboard player Dongsok Shin. Parthenia’s newest CD release features composers Kristin Norderval, Frances White, and Tawnie Olson: *Nothing Proved: New works for viols, voice, and electronics*.

More information about Parthenia is available at parthenia.org.

Parthenia is represented by *GEMS Live!* Artist Management and records for MSR Classics

Award-winning countertenor CODY BOWERS is a native of Newnan, Georgia where he grew up with a love of music and singing. Mr. Bowers found his countertenor voice in The Spivey Hall Children’s Choir based in Metro-Atlanta. Mr. Bowers earned the degree Bachelor of Music from the College-Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati, and later earned a Master of Music degree in Voice performance at Rice University as the Rita C. Handley-Bollinger Endowed Fellow of Voice and Opera. Mr. Bowers is a 2022 National Semifinalist and three-time District Winner of the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition, and a George London Foundation Encouragement Award Recipient. Mr. Bowers is an avid performer on the concert stage and has been featured as an ensemble singer and soloist in the United States, North America and Europe, and has performed with Parthenia Viol Consort, Handel & Haydn Society, Boston Camerata, Bach Akademie Charlotte, Bach Society Houston, The Henry Purcell Society of Boston, VAE: Cincinnati’s premier choral ensemble, Collegium Cincinnati, The Choir of The Church of the Advent, and Ensemble Altera. Mr. Bowers is an active teacher in the greater Boston area and before that taught privately in Georgia, Ohio, and Texas. Mr. Bowers served as a member of the staff at Rice University as a Speech Coach for members of the Rice community seeking to develop their skills in oratory and public presentation.

Cody Bowers is a student of Lynn Eustis and is represented by Gloria Parker at Insignia Artists Management.

WILL AYTON, the youngest of four children, was born in 1948 in Jingyuan, Kansu province, China, of missionary parents. He received a BME from Shenandoah Conservatory of Music, a MME from New England Conservatory of Music, and a DMA in Music Theory and Composition from Boston University. He currently lives with his wife, Nancy, in Providence, Rhode Island. He has spent most of his professional years as a professor of music at Roger Williams University in Rhode Island, as well as directing and performing with various ensembles (viola da gamba) and stealing as much time as possible for composing. Now that he is retired, he is spending more time composing as well as exploring the potential of his not-so-green thumb growing vegetables as well as feeding his squirrel and bird friends.

ABOUT THE VIOL

The viol, or viola da gamba, is a family of stringed instruments celebrated in European music from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment. Today on both sides of the Atlantic, soloists as well as viol groups—known as “consorts”—have rediscovered the lost repertoire and ethereal beauty of this early instrument. The viol was first known as the “bowed guitar” (vihuela da arco), a joint descendent of the medieval fiddle and the 15th-century Spanish guitar. Unlike its cousin, the arm-supported violin (viola da braccio), the viol is held upright on the leg (gamba) or between the legs; its bow is gripped underhand; and its body is made of bent or molded wood. These characteristics lend a distinctive lightness and resonance to viol sound that have inspired a wave of new works by 21st-century composers and a growing enthusiasm on the part of international audiences.

Parthenia acknowledges the following people and organizations for help in making this concert possible:

David Shuler, Director of Music and Organist, and the staff of the Church of Saint Luke in the Fields; Gene Murrow, Naomi Morse, and John Thiessen of Gotham Early Music Scene; Holly Weiss, concert assistant; Peter Karl, recording engineer; Asaf Blasberg, videographer; Colleen Cody, season graphics design; Kieran Walsh, website blog; Abby Elsayed, social media.

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