

The music

Gerald Finzi	<i>Let me enjoy the earth</i> <i>When I set out for Lyonesse</i>
Ernest Farrar	<i>Brittany</i>
Finzi	<i>As I lay in the early sun</i>
Ivor Gurney	<i>E'en such is time</i>
Finzi	<i>Ditty</i> <i>For life I had never cared greatly</i> <i>Epeisodia</i> <i>To Lizbie Browne</i> <i>The Sigh</i> <i>Since we loved</i> <i>June on Castle Hill</i>
Martin Bussey	<i>In days like these</i>
Finzi	<i>To a Poet a thousand years hence</i> <i>'Aria' from Farewell to Arms</i> <i>On Parent Knees</i> <i>The Dance Continued</i>

The following notes are an abridged version of those prepared for the Ludlow English Song Weekend earlier this year by Dr Philip Lancaster, who has kindly given us permission to make use of them. He has commented: "Since the programme is in its way a survey of the life and themes of Finzi's life, I tried to create an overarching survey that picked up on ideas in the letters and the music, giving context and a sense of the whole life and how the work and other things fitted. It isn't therefore a potted history of each work, as is more usual for such notes."

The Song Texts have also been kindly shared by Ludlow.

This recital is inspired by a major piece of scholarship published last year, produced by Finzi's biographer, Diana McVeagh: an edition of Gerald Finzi's letters, issued by *The Boydell Press*. The collection runs to more than 1,600 letters, sent and received, to/ from more than 160 correspondents. Letters 'personal, private, and immediate', they give a fascinating insight into Finzi's life and his diverse interests and we shall be hearing some of them this afternoon.

Gerald Finzi was born in London in 1901. Following the outbreak of the First World War, he and his now widowed mother moved out of the capital to Harrogate, as far as possible from Zeppelin raids. By this time he'd been learning the piano, and had already started to write his own music. In Harrogate, he continued his musical studies with Ernest Farrar, until Farrar joined up and went to war, when he turned to Edward Bairstow, organist of York Minster, to continue his development. Under Bairstow, Finzi learnt the importance of setting words to music well; and it was in Bairstow's rooms that Finzi had what Diana McVeagh has described as his 'moment on the road to

Damascus'. In 1920, Finzi took Ivor Gurney's newly published song *Sleep* to show Bairstow. Gerald recalled saying of the song, 'one has the feeling that the man who wrote that can't live long – there was such intensity contained in lyric form.' It was an affirmation of Finzi's own growing belief in song as a medium, and also the beginning of his interest in Gurney, whose work he would go on to help to preserve and promote throughout his life.

Inspired by Gurney's countryside, Finzi and his mother moved to Painswick in Gloucestershire in June 1922. During his time there Finzi began to become established as a composer. His first song cycle, *By Footpath and Stile*, was performed in London in 1923 before being published in 1925; and Finzi began to correspond and meet with other composers, including Vaughan Williams, Howells and Rubbra. By the time he left Gloucestershire for London, he'd published songs, choral works, and his first orchestral work, *A Severn Rhapsody*; and he'd begun work on his remarkable *Dies Natalis*.

Almost as soon as he arrived in London, Finzi began the first of his song cycles with piano to poems by Thomas Hardy – the poet who forms the significant backbone of his song output. Finzi began or completed around 160 songs, nearly half of which are settings of Hardy. A number of these settings are heard in this recital, with songs taken from the cycles *A Young Man's Exhortation* (composed 1926–29), *Earth and Air and Rain* (published 1936), *Before and After Summer* (1949), and from the posthumously gathered cycles, *Till Earth Outwears and I Said to Love* (both published 1956). Song settings of other poets are from similar posthumous gatherings, in the cycles *Oh Fair to See* and *To a Poet*.

Finzi was in the habit of keeping completed songs in his bottom drawer until such time as they might find some companions to make a work of greater substance and standing than a single work. The songs in these posthumous collections therefore date from the 1920s to his final works in 1956.

In London, Finzi's musical circle, reputation, and catalogue of works continued to grow. He completed a violin concerto, whose premiere Vaughan Williams conducted in 1928. He taught music theory, harmony and counterpoint for a time at the Royal Academy of Music but gave up his post in 1933 when he married artist Joyce Black – Joy. Living initially in Dorking and then Wiltshire, in 1939 they moved into a house they'd built themselves at Ashmansworth, west of Newbury, where they'd spend the rest of their lives.

During the War, Church Farm became a creative haven where Finzi could work and collect his books – and his apple trees. Both Finzis helped champion Gurney's work, as well as that of Parry and the 18th-century composers John Stanley and William Boyce. They encouraged and supported younger artists,

composers, and musicians whom they welcomed into their home; Gerald also founded the Newbury String Players.

Having suffered periods of ill health since his youth, in 1951 Finzi was diagnosed with cancer of the lymph nodes. It came after a few years of great success, with the notable completion, and first performances at the Three Choirs Festival, of the *Clarinet Concerto* (1949) and the large scale *Intimations of Immortality* (1950). In the wake of his diagnosis, Finzi composed his most ambitious instrumental work, the *Cello Concerto*. Completed in 1955, it received its first performance at the Cheltenham Festival with Barbirolli conducting the Hallé and soloist Christopher Bunting, a pupil of Casals. A year later, in September 1956, Finzi died.

Through his music and writings, a part of Gerald Finzi lives on. In the poem of James Elroy Flecker sung in this recital (*To a Poet a thousand years hence*), an artist's work "send[s their] soul through time and space / To greet you." In Finzi's own words, "I like to think that in each generation may be found a few responsive minds, and for them I should still like this work to be available. To shake hands with a good friend over the centuries is a pleasant thing, and the affection which an individual may retain after his departure is perhaps the only thing which guarantees an ultimate life to his work." With ready hands have we been able to reach out to Finzi this afternoon, to all that his work and life offers and inspires.

As mentioned already, **Thomas Hardy** (1840-1928) was the inspiration for many of Finzi's songs. Despite very different backgrounds and upbringing, they shared fundamental attitudes to life, summed up by Diana McVeigh in her biography of the composer:

"Finzi admired Hardy's dignity, his compassion, what he considered to be his rationalism, and above all his freedom from religious bigotry... They were alike in valuing traditional virtues, but with free-thinking minds... They had in common three main preoccupations: the futility of war, an obsession with time's passing, and the beauty of the natural world and its indifference to man..."

Apart from Finzi's songs, this recital also includes one each by **Ernest Farrar** (1885-1918), Finzi's first real music teacher, who was killed just before the end of the war; **Ivor Gurney** (1890-1937); and **Martin Bussey** (b1958).

Gurney was crucial to Finzi's development in suggesting how best to marry word and music. He'd already published two fine volumes of poetry (*Severn and Somme* in 1917 and *War's Embers* in 1919) before, a few years later, the Finzis and others helped him prepare two collections of songs for publication – *Ludlow and Teme* in 1923 and *The Western Playland* in 1926.

These were his only songs to be published in his lifetime and all were settings of AE Housman. Although Gurney wrote 300-odd poems in all, he set very few of these to music.

E'en such is time is to words by Walter Raleigh. Appropriately for a song written in the trenches in 1917, its subject is mortality.

Martin Bussey is both composer and conductor. He currently directs the Chester Bach Singers, Cantiones Choir of Oswestry, and is a vocal tutor at Manchester University. His songs and choral music have appeared on many occasions on *BBC Radio 3* and performed at venues such as the Ludlow English Song Weekend and Wigmore Hall.

In days like these sets words from a letter Finzi wrote to Herbert Howells in 1940, *inter alia* suggesting the difficulty of finding musical inspiration during wartime.

*Main note by Dr Philip Lancaster.
Supplementary material by Dick Ware.*

The artists

Robert Murray *tenor* **James Atkinson** *baritone*
Iain Burnside *piano* **Donald Macleod** *reader*

Robert Murray is renowned for his intelligent musicianship and incisive dramatic portrayals of a broad operatic, concert, and recital repertoire. He's now firmly established as one of the most exciting musicians of his generation. He studied Music and History at the University of Newcastle, and went on to study voice at the Royal College of Music, before joining first the National Opera Studio, and finally the Jette Parker Young Artist Programme at the Royal Opera House.

This season, Robert performed as Mark in *The Midsummer Marriage* and is making his debut as Florestan in *Fidelio* with the Irish National Opera. He's also performed in *The Cunning Little Vixen* with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Haydn's *Creation* with the Handel & Haydn Society, and given recitals at the Wigmore Hall, the Lammermuir Festival and Oxford Lieder. This summer he returned to Garsington as Quint and Prologue in *The Turn of the Screw*.

intermusica.co.uk/artist/Robert-Murray

James Atkinson is a graduate of the Royal College of Music Opera Studio, where he studied with Alison Wells. He won the Royal Over-Seas League Singers Prize 2022, first prize at the Maureen Lehane Vocal Awards 2018, and both first and Audience Prizes at the Somerset Song Prize 2019.

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Festival website little-missenden.org

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Programme Notes

'STILL ALIVE AND FRYING BACON'

Gerald Finzi: a Life in Song and Letters



3pm, Sunday October 16th 2022
Little Missenden Church

62nd Little Missenden Festival

James recently made his debut with Welsh National Opera as Masetto in *Don Giovanni*. He's also in high demand as a recitalist and has performed at the London Song Festival, the Lewes Song Festival, The Red House in Aldeburgh, the North Norfolk Music Festival and the Ludlow English Song Weekend. James has also made multiple appearances at the Oxford Lieder Festival and his September 2021 recital with Sholto Kynoch at the Lammermuir Festival was broadcast live on *BBC Radio 3* as a Lunchtime Live Concert.

jamesatkinsonbaritone.com

Iain Burnside is internationally acclaimed as a leading collaborative pianist and has worked with many of the world's great singers.

His discography features over 50 CDs, spanning a huge sweep of repertoire. Highlights include the *Gramophone Award*-winning *NMC Songbook*, Schubert cycles with Roderick Williams on *Chandos* and a series of English Song for *Naxos*. He's Artistic Director of the Ludlow English Song Weekend and curates programmes for Wigmore Hall and a variety of festivals.

Iain is an award-winning broadcaster, familiar to listeners to *Radio 3*, and earning a Sony Radio *Award for Voices*. He's pioneered a particular form of dramatic concert, with works based variously around Franz Schubert, Clara Schumann and Ivor Gurney. His most recent piece, *A View from the Villa*, unpicks Wagner's relationship with Mathilde Wesendonck. He has a long association with the Guildhall School, gives masterclasses at home and abroad and is Artistic Consultant to Grange Park Opera.

askonasholt.com/artists/iain-burnside

Donald Macleod was educated in Glasgow and at St Andrew's University where he studied psychology (and from which he was awarded an honorary DMus. in 2017). His musical education was fairly rudimentary: his piano teacher gave up on him at the age of eight, telling his parents that he was wasting their money!

Although listening to *Radio 3* became a habit early on, Donald had envisaged a career working with an assortment of exotic creatures in the BBC's Natural History Unit. In fact he began his career as a presenter in 1982 on *Radio 3* and for *BBC1's 60 minutes* as a TV reporter and newsreader. He then became Head of Presentation on *Radio 3* for four years, and in May 1996 he took up the challenge of setting up and presenting *Through the Night*, that station's first 24-hour broadcasting service.

Donald has presented more Proms than he cares to remember, covering the widest imaginable spectrum of music. In 1999 he became the first person to present, single-handedly, *Radio 3's* flagship programme *Composer of the Week*, which he has done ever since.