

# SHAKESPEARE SONGS



**DIRECTED BY  
DAVID CROWN**

**[WWW.VOX-CHOIR-OXFORD.CO.UK](http://WWW.VOX-CHOIR-OXFORD.CO.UK)**

## David Crown



Following his choral scholarship at King's College, Cambridge, David went on to further study and then to work as an operatic soloist. He has won many prestigious awards and scholarships including, amongst others, the NFMS/Esso Award, the Warwick Artists Young Musicians Trust Competition, the Young Songmakers' competition and the Bayreuth Bursary. David has sung under the baton of conductors such as Martyn Brabbins, Richard Hickox and David Parry.

David has been responsible for the founding of two of Oxford's leading choirs: vOx Chamber Choir and Opus 48. Whilst vOx has been running for seven years, Opus 48 was founded in September 2018 and ran an acclaimed first season that included performances of Orff's *Carmina Burana* and the requiems of Fauré, Duruflé and Brahms in venues in Oxford & London.

David is also Musical Director of Cheltenham Bach Choir and has recently led the choir through its 70th Anniversary season. He has toured with the choir to Göttingen, Germany, to direct the Göttinger Stadtkantorei and the Göttinger Symphonie Orchester culminating in a sell-out performance of Elgar's *Enigma Variations* and Vaughan Williams' *A Sea Symphony*.



## vOx

vOx is one of the region's leading chamber choirs. Based in Oxford under the direction of David Crown, the choir sings challenging, mostly *a cappella* works from the Renaissance through to contemporary music, with a continuing focus on excellence in singing and choral technique.

As well as performing 4-6 concerts per year in and around Oxfordshire, the choir tours and has recently made its second recording, works by Alexander Campkin.

We are always happy to hear from keen singers and anyone interested in supporting us. Please contact us via our website.



[www.vox-choir-oxford.co.uk](http://www.vox-choir-oxford.co.uk)

— PROGRAMME —

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872 – 1958)	Three Shakespeare Songs Full fathom five The cloud capp'd towers Over hill, over dale
John Bennett (1575 – after 1614) William Byrd (1543 – 1623)	Two Madrigals Weep, O mine eyes The sweet & merry month of May
David Bednall (2016)	Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
John Tavener (1943 – 2013)	Song for Athene: May flights of angels...
William Byrd	Why do I use my paper, ink and pen?
Nils Lindberg (1989)	Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Gabriel Jackson (2016)	Hark! Hark! The Lark...

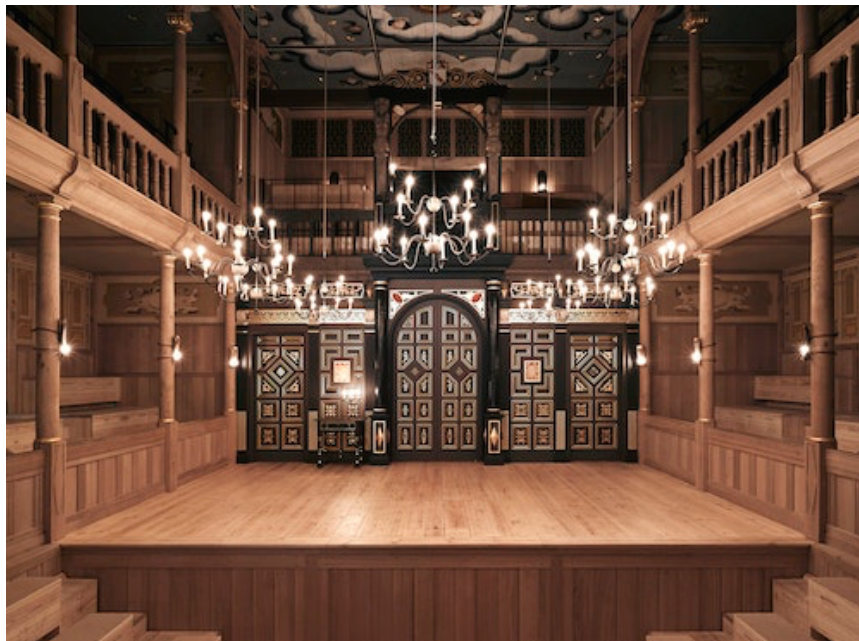
— INTERVAL —

John Farmer (late 16 <sup>th</sup> century) Orlando Gibbons (1583 – 1625) Thomas Morley (1557 – 1602)	Three Madrigals Fair Phyllis The silver swan April is in my mistress' face
Matthew Harris (1991)	Four Shakespeare Songs Take, O take, those lips away Tell me, where is fancy bred Under the greenwood tree Come, come away, Death
Jaako Mäntyjärvi (1984)	Four Shakespeare Songs Come, come away Death Ye spotted snakes Double, double, toil and trouble Full fathom five
Thomas Morley	It was a lover and his lass

## *Song in Shakespeare's plays*



Beyond the ‘hey nonny-nos’, reminiscent of the *Blackadder* theme-song minstrel, songs play a rich and complex role in Shakespeare’s plays. Shakespeare showcased the talent of his company, for example creating the role of Feste in *Twelfth Night* for the musical and literary talents of Robert Armin. After Armin joined the Chamberlain’s Men, Catherine A. Henze estimates that singing in Shakespeare’s plays increased from around one song and nine lines of singing per play, to around four songs and twenty nine lines of singing. The Jacobean period also saw the rise of a new high-tech performance venue: the indoor playhouse. The Globe has recently created a new replica of this type of indoor candlelit theatre - the new Sam Wanamaker playhouse. Along with the major innovation of artificial lighting, these intimate indoor venues also provided a better acoustic, allowing companies to make even greater use of music in the plays. Music may also have been played between the acts as the candles were trimmed or changed. When Shakespeare wrote the music-filled *The Tempest*, the King’s Men had access to the indoor Blackfriars Theatre, and the first recorded performance of the play was in front of King James I&VI in 1611. The play pulls out all the stops, taking advantage of these state-of-the-art performance venues: the play includes a magical storm; Ariel appearing in many forms including a harpy, making a feast-covered table magically disappear; and a masque featuring the floating descent of the goddess Juno. Alongside these other special effects, the play includes four songs sung by Ariel, who also plays on the pipe and tabor during the play. Unfortunately, no settings survive of the songs originally used in performance, as far as we aware—but this absence also creates the space for the imaginative setting of these texts.



*The Sam Wanamaker Playhouse*

## *The literary role of songs*



Songs can serve a variety of literary purposes. Songs, in and of themselves, can sometimes be a plot device. ‘Tell me where is fancy bred’ in *The Merchant of Venice* allows Portia to defy the test left by her father to posthumously vet her prospective suitors: she sneakily gives her preferred candidate Bassanio a huge hint to the riddle via the song which she requests before he faces the test. Perhaps it is because the song will lead to marriage that Harris takes the very odd decision to set a text - which is a damning

inditement of man’s capacity to be taken in by external appearance - to a tune which sounds like a happy campfire sing-along. Songs like the jilted lover Mariana’s ‘Take Those Lips Away’ from *Measure for Measure* can foreshadow future action. The play later features a bed-trick (a disturbing, if implausible, early modern plot device), in which Mariana’s ex Angelo will be fooled into sleeping with her again, by being led to believe she is Isabella. The image ‘lights that do mislead the morn’, which Harris emphasizes in his setting with repetition, gestures towards this later deception. The urgency and darkness of Harris’s setting in some ways captures the erotic frustration and ethical ambiguities which characterise this subplot.

Songs can also reveal the nature of a character. Characters can use their songs to pass comment on others, such as Feste’s ‘Come Away Death’ in *Twelfth Night*. The naval-gazing lover Orsino requests a song from the wise fool Feste. Both Mäntyjärvi and Harris reflect the tragic drama of the text in their settings, however, this might be taking the song too much at face value. Feste’s song pastiches Orsino’s frequent reliance on the clichés of Renaissance love poetry. Some tropes would not be out of place in some of this evening’s early modern vernacular songs, such as being killed by a lover (a popular early modern euphemism), or whining about mistreatment by a supposedly cruel fair who dares not be to interested. Feste presents a critical mirror to Orsino, reflecting the self-absorption of his love-language. In the song we learn far more about the suffering lover than the object of their love. The song is also a classic example of *apophasis*, the rhetorical strategy of saying something by denying it: the more elaborately the speaker demands not making a fuss over their death (no flowers, no friends), the more of a fuss they make. As a famous fan of music, however, it seems likely that Orsino would enjoy these sombre and poignant settings.

The songs can also offer more unexpected insights into character: Ariel’s eerily beautiful ‘Full Fathom Five’ from *The Tempest* exposes the cruelty either of the spirit or (less surprisingly) Prospero. The song is sung by an invisible Ariel to Ferdinand. Prospero’s instruction to Ariel about this song is unheard by the audience: Prospero whispers a command to Ariel, who accepts. We do not know what errand Ariel has

been instructed to complete. It is therefore possible that its Ariel's own spin on the errand to so un-necessarily elaborate to Ferdinand on the death of his father. Or it may further demonstrate Prospero's own vengeful sadism. Either way, the text of the song riffs on the blazon, a technique common to Petrarchan love poetry, in which the beloved is described from the head down, with each facial feature likened to a precious material. The unsettling song uses this technique to linger, in cruel detail, on the (impossibly quick) decay of Ferdinand's father into precious pearl and coral - tormenting Ferdinand with a death which has not actually occurred. Vaughan Williams' astonishing setting especially leans into the 'strangeness' of this song - a word that is particularly highlighted with the striking cluster chord with suspended natural fifth. Williams captures both the delicacy and morbidity of its imagery. The long runs on 'fade' and 'sea-change' reflect the text's over-fixation on detail. 'Sea-change' is also dramatically emphasised by Mäntyjärvi, resolving the flattened fifth in the B7 chord to a natural fifth. It is worth remembering that the insistent 'ding-dong bells' integral to both pieces are the imagined underwater funeral bells of Ferdinand's father - making their persistent presence harshly mocking.

### ***Setting texts which are not songs***

Several of the texts this evening are not originally songs at all. Two composers, for example, decided to set Shakespeare's famous Sonnet 18 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?' The tight structure of the sonnet form in some ways organically offers the composers key moments to change tone. Sonnet 18 follows the classic so-called 'Shakespearean sonnet' structure: split into three quatrains (groups of four lines), and a rhyming couplet. We expect a logical change in the argument at line eight (known as the volta), and the couplet - which this sonnet delivers. (For those who are interested, the sonnet structure was in use decades before Shakespeare's sonnets, by such pioneers as Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey).



It can be helpful to think about sonnets as a little argument, or logical problem. Sonnet 18 is a struggle between youth, mortality, and eternity: the fair youth is young and beautiful now, but the natural world has an annoying habit of changing. In the first quatrain the speaker introduces the central conceit of their lover as a summer's day, but also concomitantly the ephemerality of summer beauty 'rough winds do shake the darling buds of May' and 'summer's lease has all too short a date'. The second quatrain develops the fleeting of summer, as the sun scorches too harshly, and time continues on its inevitable journey, turning youth to age. Then we hit the volta: 'But thy eternal summer shall not fade'. In this third quatrain the speaker argues the youth will cheat death, becoming preserved in the poem: 'Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,/When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st'. Finally, in the closing couplet, the speaker lands on the (ever so slightly self-aggrandizing) conclusion that the perpetuity of the poem will eternalise the beloved—a neat structure for a composer to set.

Whereas Lindberg largely uses the same melody for the first two quatrains, Bednall draws a distinction between the first two quatrains. He significantly switches into the minor as we enter the second quatrain ‘Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines’, reflecting the second quatrain’s greater emphasis on flux and mortality. ‘Lovely’ and ‘temperate’ are words which both composers appear drawn to – rather pleasingly in a sonnet which in some ways struggles to ‘temper’ or moderate extremes (youth and age, life and death). Both composers take up the sonnet’s gift of the volta, the logical change in direction: ‘But thy eternal summer shall not fade’. Lindberg introduces a new melody. Bednall returns us from minor to major. Bednall also exquisitely reflects the return of light to the poem, with the sparkling high ‘fair’ which all parts linger on. Both composers finally bring us triumphantly home with the couplet. Both set up a contrast between the entrance of death in the poem and the eternity of the couplet: Lindberg sets death as part of the run up to the final couplet, awkwardly jumping between parallel fifths perhaps echoing the quatrain’s struggle between denying and implicitly imagining the lover’s death. Bednall takes us into a dark cave of death right below the stave. For the couplet, Bednall then splits the choir in two. In the couplet the speaker uses an image of man’s ability to breathe to express the future of the human race, and therefore the ongoing line of potential readers of the sonnet (including us, now). Bednall reflects this image, in an extraordinary interlocking chain, as the choirs swap ‘so long as men can breathe’, ‘so long as eyes can see’ in an unbreaking relay. Finally, the choir reunites in the final jubilant chords, which announce the beloved’s immortality through poetry – soaring up to the final, beloved ‘thee’.

**Dr Leah Veronese, University of Oxford**

*Sometime lecturer in early modern literature and sometime soprano.*





## Some Texts

Ariel: **Full fathom five** thy father lies.  
Of his bones are coral made;  
Those are pearls that were his eyes;  
Nothing of him that doth fade  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange.  
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:

Spirits: Ding-dong.

Ariel: Hark! now I hear them—ding-dong, bell.



*A Sea Change  
Both Rich  
and Strange*

*The Tempest*



**The cloud-capped towers**, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve;  
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.

*The Tempest*

**Over hill, over dale,**

Thorough bush, thorough brier,  
Over park, over pale,

Thorough flood, thorough fire:  
I do wander everywhere,

Swifter than the moon's sphere;  
And I serve the Fairy Queen,

To dew her orbs upon the green.  
The cowslips tall her pensioners be.

In their gold coats spots you see;  
Those be rubies, fairy favours;

In those freckles live their savours.

I must go seek some dew-drops here,  
and hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.



*A Midsummer Night's Dream*



**Weep, O mine eyes** and cease not,  
alas, these your spring tides methinks increase not.  
O when begin you to swell so high  
that I may drown me in you?

**This Sweet and Merry Month of May**

This sweet and merry month of May,  
While Nature wantons in her prime,  
And birds do sing, and beasts do play  
For pleasure of the joyful time,  
I choose the first for holiday,  
And greet Eliza with a rhyme:  
O beauteous Queen of second Troy,  
Take well in worth a simple toy.



**Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?**

Thou art more lovely and more temperate.  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimmed,  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed;  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;  
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.  
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

**Sonnet 18**



Alleluia. *May flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.*

Alleluia. Remember me O Lord, when you come into your kingdom.

Alleluia. Give rest O Lord to your handmaid, who has fallen asleep.

Alleluia. The Choir of Saints have found the well-spring of life and door of paradise.

Alleluia. *Life: a shadow and a dream*

Alleluia. Weeping at the grave creates the song: Alleluia!

Come, enjoy rewards and crowns I have prepared for you.

**Tavener, “Song for Athene”  
with *italicised* fragments from *Hamlet***



**Why do I use my paper, ink and pen,**  
And call my wits to counsel what to say,  
Such memories were made for mortal men,  
I speak of Saints, whose names cannot decay,  
An Angels trump, were fitter for to sound,  
Their glorious death, if such on earth were found.



**attributed to Sir Henry Walpole**



**Hark, hark! the lark** at heaven's gate sings,  
And Phoebus 'gins arise,  
His steeds to water at those springs  
On chaliced flowers that lies;  
And winking Mary-buds begin  
To ope their golden eyes:  
With every thing that pretty is,  
My lady sweet, arise:  
Arise, arise.

**“Cymbeline”**

**Take, oh take those lips away,**  
That so sweetly were forsworn,  
And those eyes: the breake of day,  
Lights that do mislead the Morn;  
But my kisses bring again  
Seals of love, but sealed in vain.

**“Measure for Measure”**



**Under the greenwood tree**  
Who loves to lie with me,  
And turn his merry note  
Unto the sweet bird's throat,  
Come hither, come hither:  
Here shall he see  
No enemy  
But winter and rough weather.

**Tell me where is fancy bred,**  
Or in the heart or in the head?  
How begot, how nourished?  
Reply, reply.  
It is engender'd in the eyes,  
With gazing fed; and fancy dies  
In the cradle, where it lies.  
Let us all ring fancy's knell;  
I'll begin it – Ding, dong, bell.

**“Merchant of Venice”**

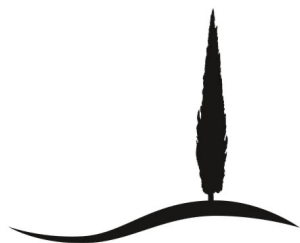
Who doth ambition shun  
And loves to live i' the sun,  
Seeking the food he eats,  
And pleased with what he gets,  
Come hither, come hither:  
Here shall he see  
No enemy  
But winter and rough weather.

**“As You Like It”**

**Come away, come away, death,**  
And in sad cypress let me be laid.  
Fly away, fly away breath;  
I am slain by a fair cruel maid.  
My shroud of white, stuck all with yew,  
O, prepare it!  
My part of death, no one so true  
Did share it.

Not a flower, not a flower sweet,  
On my black coffin let there be strown.  
Not a friend, greet my poor corpse,  
where my bones shall be thrown.  
A thousand, thousand sighs to save,  
Lay me, O where  
Sad true lover never find my grave,  
To weep there!

**“Twelfth Night”**



**Double, double toil and trouble;**  
 Fire burn and caldron bubble.  
 Fillet of a fenny snake,  
 In the caldron boil and bake;  
 Eye of newt and toe of frog,  
 Wool of bat and tongue of dog,  
 Adder's fork and blind-worm's sting,  
 Lizard's leg and howlet's wing,  
 For a charm of powerful trouble,  
 Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.  
 Double, double toil and trouble;  
 Fire burn and caldron bubble.  
 Cool it with a baboon's blood,  
 Then the charm is firm and good.

**“Macbeth”**



*The field of Early Modern Studies is becoming increasingly attentive to the role of **race-craft** in early modern literature: race-craft recognises that race is an artificial construct, which literature is complicit in creating and propagating. With the beginning of colonial expansion in the early modern period, early modern writers were particularly invested in creating grotesque and monstrous representations of people of colour, which concomitantly served to justify English expansion and dominion. The ingredients in the witches' broth include outlandish animal parts, (such as a tiger's entrails), and horrifying dismembered body parts (such as the 'finger of birth strangled babe'). Therefore, the presence of parts of 'Jew', 'Turk', and 'Tartar' as ingredients others these people: their bodies are made both exotic and monstrous, as they are aligned to the other ingredients in the potion. Concomitantly, this normalises and naturalises white bodies.*

**Ye spotted snakes** with double tongue,  
 Thorny hedgehogs, be not seen;  
 Newts and blindworms, do no wrong,  
 Come not near our fairy Queen.

Philomele, with melody  
 Sing in our sweet lullaby;  
 Lulla, lulla, lullaby, lulla, lulla, lullaby:  
 Never harm, Nor spell nor charm,  
 Come our lovely lady nigh;  
 So, good night, with lullaby.

Weaving spiders, come not here;  
 Hence, you long-legged spinners, hence!  
 Beetles black, approach not near;  
 Worm nor snail, do no offence.

Philomele, with melody  
 Sing in our sweet lullaby;  
 Lulla, lulla, lullaby, lulla, lulla, lullaby:  
 Never harm, Nor spell nor charm,  
 Come our lovely lady nigh;  
 So, good night, with lullaby.

**“Midsummer Night's Dream**



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**Soprano**

Karen Benny  
Meryl Davies  
Lauren Ensign  
Leah Veronese  
Catherine Warren

**Alto**

Eleri Adams  
Ellen Border  
Angela Bryant  
Elizabeth Greenlaw  
Roxanne Ransome

**Bass**

Pegram Harrison  
Richard Mugnaioni  
Huw Rowley  
Nick Shire-Feldman

**Tenor**

Alan Jiang  
Kapil Tuladhar  
Simon Wellings  
David Willcock



# FUTURE DATES 2023

**vOx** celebrates its 10th birthday next year. To celebrate we have a fantastic mixed programme of music including Masses by Frank Martin and Pizzetti next summer, an introduction to Antoine Brumel at Easter, and the chance to hear ‘the best Renaissance Christmas music ever’. The anniversary season starts with a special new project curated for vOx by poet Zsuzsanna Ardó.

**PlanetWoman** – Across Time and Space features music by Hildegard of Bingen, and a series of new works by mostly women contemporary composers from across the globe.

This unique collaboration will be performed twice over the weekend of 25-26 November 2023. Do put a date in your diary to hear vOx perform this series of world premières:

25 November, 7.30 pm; St Margaret Pattens, Rood Ln, Eastcheap,  
London EC3M 1HS

26 November, 7.30 pm; SJE Arts, St John the Evangelist, Iffley Rd,  
Oxford OX4 1EH

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*Full Fathom Five (1947) Jackson Pollock*