

# The Cherwell Singers

present

## *Copland and his colleagues*

*Choral music and songs from  
twentieth-century America*

<b>Filippo Turkheimer</b>	baritone
<b>Dónal McCann</b>	piano
<b>James Brown</b>	conductor

Sunday, 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 2025  
Chapel of Mansfield College, Oxford

# Programme

## Aaron Copland

Zion's Walls  
At the River  
Long Time Ago  
Simple Gifts  
The Boatmen's Dance

*(Piano solo)*

Midsummer Nocturne

The Little Horses  
The Promise of Living †

## Interval

### Other American composers

The Last Words of David  
The Road Not Taken

Randall Thompson  
Randall Thompson

*(Solo song)*

Serenity *(soloist: Alice Green)*

Charles Ives

*(Solo song)*

Feldeinsamkeit

Charles Ives

Sure on this Shining Night  
The Road Home

Samuel Barber  
Stephen Paulus

Make Our Garden Grow

Leonard Bernstein

*The audience is asked not to applaud within the groups of pieces*

Filippo Turkheimer  
Dónal McCann  
Joseph Crane  
James Brown

baritone  
piano  
piano †  
conductor

# Copland and his colleagues

## *Choral music and songs from twentieth-century America*

2025 marks the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Aaron Copland, referred to by his peers and critics as the “Dean of American Composers”. His biographer, Howard Pollack, says Copland “had perhaps the most distinctive and identifiable musical voice produced by this country so far, an individuality [...] that exerted enormous influence on multitudes of contemporaries and successors”. It is in this spirit that we present this concert, which in its first half particularly explores choral arrangements of Copland’s *Old American Songs* in this, the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their composition, and in the second provides music by Copland’s colleagues - fellow twentieth century American composers.

We hope the optimism, direction in expression in sentiment, and songfulness of this music makes for an enjoyable summer concert to conclude our 2024-25 season.

James Brown

## Notes

### *The Composers*

It could be argued that American classical music started with **Charles Ives** (1874-1954), the earliest composer in today’s concert. Certainly, there were many composers in America before him (e.g. Edward McDowell, Amy Beach, and his teacher, Horatio Parker), but they were mostly European-educated, or worked in a limited area (e.g. William Billings, who invented a piety in music that was unworldly in its hominess). It was Ives’s collection of *114 Songs* (1922) which displayed the range of American sounds which he incorporated in his music – there were dramatic poems, sentimental songs, war songs, religious songs, folk tunes, hymn tunes, cowboy songs, songs

adapted from instrumental music, Stephen Foster's ragtime, and more. In addition, songs bristling with dissonances and tone clusters sat next to songs of the most elementary harmonic simplicity. He was among the first composers to engage in a systematic program of experimental music, taking up musical techniques including polytonality, polyrhythm, tone clusters, aleatory (random) elements, and quarter tones.

**Aaron Copland** (1900-1990) had a conventional upbringing – his mother was a singer and pianist, and so he was taught these things. But it was when he heard the pianist Paderewski that he gained the urge to become a composer. He spent the 1920s in awe of the Parisian musicians of that time; in Paris he studied with Nadia Boulanger, whose enthusiasm made him realise the importance of harmony which he had previously thought of as “old stuff” to him. But more important to him than that was the opportunity he had to meet people like Francois Poulenc and Igor Stravinsky – Boulanger opened doors for him.

In the 1930s his contact with the German Gebrauchsmusik (“utility music”) movement encouraged him to write music for young people – initially piano music and operas. At the same time he moved his focus onto American sources of inspiration; in 1932 he wrote a retrospective review of Ives's large volume of songs, though for him the great variety was not necessarily a strength – he would have preferred to keep the modern songs and omit the romantic and popular ones – but it is clear that Ives's experience gave Copland permission to draw on the same diverse veins of music for his work from the mid-1930s. His ballet scores for *Billy the Kid* and *Rodeo* demonstrated this change of direction, and for the next 25 years his many film scores (for one of which he was awarded an Oscar) and his other (mainly orchestral) music followed the same path. His most popular works, such as the *Fanfare for the Common Man* (written in response to America's entry into the second world war) and *Appalachian Spring* can be seen as embodying the “American-ness” of his music.

But Copland wrote little vocal music; this became the province of his close contemporary, **Randall Thompson** (1899-1984). Thompson ranks as one of America's greatest 20th-century choral composers, along with his one-time student Leonard Bernstein. He was born in New York, and studied in the US with Ernst Bloch and in Italy with Gian Francesco Malpiero. Among other places, he later taught at the Eastman School of Music, the Curtis Institute of Music, and Harvard University. Although Thompson and Copland were

exact contemporaries, and are often cited as having similar approaches to composition, they don't appear to have much direct contact. Thompson's style is conservative and Neoclassical, combining traditional forms with 20th-century styles. It also exhibits a highly developed sense of form and counterpoint. He wrote in various genres, but is best known for his vocal and choral music – being known as “The Dean of American Choral Composers”, mirroring the informal title used for Copland.

**Samuel Barber** (1910-1981) studied at the Curtis Institute of Music, where he met Gian Carlo Menotti, who became his partner in life as well as music. Barber's music usually eschewed the experimental trends of musical modernism in favour of traditional 19th-century harmonic language and formal structure embracing lyricism and emotional expression. However, he adopted elements of modernism after 1940 in some of his compositions, such as an increased use of dissonance and chromaticism, the use of tonal ambiguity and a narrow use of serialism. His music does not have the distinctive American character that Ives and Copland displayed. He wasn't averse to arranging his music for different performers, notably in the case of a movement from a string quartet, which became the orchestral *Adagio*, and then the choral *Agnus Dei*.

**Leonard Bernstein** (1918-1990) studied at Harvard and at Curtis (where he studied under, among others, Randall Thompson). He has been described as “one of the most prodigiously talented and successful musicians in American history”. He was as well-known as a conductor as he was for his composition – and he was also a political activist and an educator. Over his career he won a considerable number of prizes and honours for his music in all genres; and his distinctively American voice can be heard in works as diverse as *Chichester Psalms*, *West Side Story*, and *Mass*.

**Stephen Paulus** (1949-2014) is best known for his choral music and operas (of which he wrote nine). The anthem *Pilgrim's Hymn* has been sung at the funerals of two American Presidents, and his opera *The Postman Always Rings Twice* was the first American opera to be produced at the Edinburgh Festival. Paulus's music has been described by critics as rugged, angular, lyrical, lean, rhythmically aggressive, original, often gorgeous, moving, and uniquely American. It is generally tonal and melodic, but it certainly falls within the modern American tradition.

## ***The Music***

Although Copland didn't write much music for chorus, he did set a number of songs from various old American sources for voice and piano, with the title *Old American Songs*; they were published in two sets, the first of which was premiered by Peter Pears and Benjamin Britten. The songs were later arranged for chorus, by other hands, and some of these arrangements have become well known.

***Zion's Walls*** is a revivalist song with words and melody credited to **John G. McCurry**. As well as this setting, the tune was used again by Copland in his opera *The Tender Land*.

Come fathers and mothers,  
Come sisters and brothers,  
Come join us in singing the praises of Zion.  
O fathers, don't you feel determined  
To meet within the walls of Zion?  
We'll shout and go round the walls of Zion.

***At the River*** is an arrangement of a beloved 1865 hymn tune by **Robert Lowry**. It has been sung on many occasions, including the memorial concerts for Copland and for Leonard Bernstein.

Shall we gather by the river,  
Where bright angels' feet have trod,  
With its crystal tide forever  
Flowing by the throne of God?

*Yes, we'll gather by the river,  
The beautiful, the beautiful river,  
Gather with the saints by the river  
That flows by the throne of God.*

Ere we reach the shining river  
Lay we every burden down,  
Praise our spirits will deliver  
And provide our robe and crown.

*Yes, we'll gather at the river [etc]*

Soon we'll reach the shining river,  
Soon our pilgrimage will cease,  
Soon our happy hearts will quiver  
With the melody of peace.

*Yes, we'll gather at the river [etc]*

*Long Time Ago* is a traditional setting of a nostalgic lyrical ballad discovered by Copland in the Harris Collection at Brown University.

On the lake where droop'd the willow, / Long time ago,  
Where the rock threw back the billow, / Brighter than snow.  
Dwelt a maid beloved and cherish'd / By high and low,  
But with autumn leaf she perished / Long time ago

Rock and tree and flowing water, / Long time ago,  
Bird and bee and blossom taught her / Love's spell to know.  
While to my fond words she listen'd / Murmuring low,  
Tenderly her blue eyes glisten'd, / Long time ago.

*Simple Gifts* was a favourite song of the Shaker sect. The text and melody were written by **Elder Joseph Brackett** in 1848. Copland featured the tune prominently in his ballet *Appalachian Spring*, in a masterful set of variations. In later scoring the melody for voice, however, he gave the song a recitative-like quality by incorporating an accompaniment squarely placed on weak beats, ensuring that this version of *Simple Gifts* would be sung without a regular rhythmic pulse. Vocal or orchestral medium aside, Copland's resurrection of *Simple Gifts* has promoted the once-forgotten Shaker melody to the prominent role of an American anthem.

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,  
'tis the gift to come down where you ought to be  
And when we find ourselves in the place just right  
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.

When true simplicity is gained  
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed  
To turn, turn will be our delight  
Till by turning, turning we come round right.

*The Boatmen's Dance* is Copland's arrangement of an original banjo melody by "Dixie" composer **Daniel Decatur Emmett** (1815-1904), published in Boston in 1843. The original text was laden with Negro dialect, and Copland reworked it to remove the racial connotations (in fact, he even changed the title from *De Boatman's Dance*). As far as the musical setting is concerned, Copland ingeniously designed the song to reflect the Ohio River landscape, as demonstrated by the call and echo effect employed prior to each verse.

High row the boatmen row,  
Floatin' down the river, the Ohio.

The boatmen dance, the boatmen sing,  
The boatmen up to ev'rything,  
And when the boatman gets on shore  
He spends his cash and works for more.

*Then dance the boatmen dance,  
O dance the boatmen dance.  
O dance all night 'til broad daylight,  
And go home with the gals in the mornin'.*

High row the boatmen row,  
Floatin' down the river, the Ohio.

I went on board the other day  
To see what the boatmen had to say.  
There I let my passion loose  
An' they cram me in the callaboose.

*O dance the boatmen dance [etc]*

High row the boatmen row,  
Floatin' down the river, the Ohio.

The boatman is a thrifty man,  
There's none can do as the boatman can.  
I never see a pretty gal in my life  
But that she was a boatman's wife.

*O dance the boatmen dance [etc]*

High row the boatmen row,  
Floatin' down the river, the Ohio.

A lifelong aim of Copland's was to provide contemporary music for young performers, as Bartók did with his piano collections *For Children* and *Mikrokosmos*. He planned a three-volume series with this in mind, but it did not come to fruition. A piece intended for the series was discovered in Copland's files by composer Phillip Ramey, who edited the work in 1977. The title *Midsummer Nocturne* was agreed on by Copland and Ramey, to whom the piece is dedicated.



*The Little Horses* is a setting of a lullaby from the South, based on a version transcribed from a recording made by the folksong collector Alan Lomax in the 1930s.

Hush you bye, don't you cry,  
Go to sleepy little baby.

When you wake, you shall have,  
All the pretty little horses.  
Blacks and bays, dapples and grays,  
Coach and six-a little horses.

Hush you bye, don't you cry,  
Go to sleepy little baby.

When you wake, you'll have sweet cake  
and all the pretty little horses.  
A black and a bay and a brown and a gray,  
and a coach and six-a little horses.

Hush you bye, don't you cry, oh you pretty little baby.  
Go to sleepy little baby, oh you pretty little baby.

Copland's 1954 opera for young people, *The Tender Land*, evokes the dignity and meaningfulness of labour. The librettist was Horace Everett, a pseudonym for Erik Johns. Farming – cultivating the soil of America's heartland and reaping the benefits of its harvest for a balanced and fulfilling life – is central to the opera's theme. It tells the story of a family in the Midwest in the 1930s during the spring harvest, and the protagonist's graduation from high school. Copland was inspired to write the opera after seeing Walker Evans' photographs of the Depression era. *The Promise of Living* forms the first act finale of the opera, and grows out of the early American revivalist song, *Zion's Walls*. The same year the opera was completed, Copland adapted the music for mixed chorus. The text is an anthem to rugged self-reliance, community, the sanctity of purposeful labour, and the blessings of the harvest:

The promise of living with hope and thanksgiving  
Is born of our loving our friends and our labour.

The promise of growing with faith and with knowing  
Is born of our sharing our love with our neighbour.

The promise of loving, the promise of growing  
Is born of our singing in joy and thanksgiving.

For many a year we've know these fields  
And know all the work that makes them yield.  
We're ready to work, we're ready to lend a hand.  
By working together we'll bring in the blessings of harvest.

We plant each row with seeds of grain,  
And Providence sends us the sun and the rain.  
By lending a hand, by lending an arm  
Bring out the blessings of harvest.

Give thanks there was sunshine, give thanks there was rain,  
Give thanks we have hands to deliver the grain.

O let us be joyful, O let us be grateful to the Lord for his blessing.

The promise of living, the promise of growing  
The promise of ending is labour and sharing and loving.

Randall Thompson composed *The Last Words of David* in 1949, a year after he had returned to Harvard to teach. The Boston Symphony Orchestra commissioned it to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Serge Koussevitzky as their music director. The text Thompson used for his anthem is found in 2 Samuel 23: vs. 3-4, as part of a long song which David supposedly sang to celebrate his deliverance from Saul and other enemies. Chapter 23 identifies its portion of that song as “the last words of David”, though this seems unlikely. Nonetheless, the message in Thompson’s anthem, prescribing the character of just rulers and their reward, is timeless. The form of the piece is through-composed with three contrasting sections marked by their tempo markings: *Maestoso*, *Largo*, and *Poco più lento*.

He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.

And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain.

Alleluia, Amen.

In *The Road Not Taken*, Randall Thompson’s music melds beautifully with the text of the poem by **Robert Frost**. There is a remarkable stillness about the piece, and yet it brims with quiet suspense. The loudest dynamic in the entire piece for the chorus is *piano*. It is in the interludes in the piano’s accompaniment that there is contrasting drama. Just before the piano’s interlude before the last line of the poem, the key changes from minor to major on the word “difference”; but when the chorus returns they change back to the minor again for the same word, “difference”.

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveller, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair  
And having perhaps the better claim  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way  
I doubted if I should ever come back

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I --  
I took the one less travelled by  
And that has made all the difference

Charles Ives's song *Serenity* is a setting of part of the poem *The Brewing of Soma* by **John Greenleaf Whittier**. It may well have been connected to Ives's projected *Whittier Overture*, one of his 'Men of Literature' series. The song has the subtitle: "A unison chant", and Ives remarks that it should be sung "Very slowly, quietly and sustained, with little or no change in tempo or volume throughout". In this song Ives achieved a kind of suspension of time that is different from his other songs: the vocal line moves between a few tones in a single octave, and the piano part consists of two fixed chords that change only at the end. With an economy of tightly controlled material, Ives reaches a musical equivalent of the state of "serenity".

O, Sabbath rest of Galilee!  
O, calm of hills above,  
Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee,  
the silence of eternity  
Interpreted by love.

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,  
till all our strivings cease:  
Take from our souls the strain and stress,  
and let our ordered lives confess,  
The beauty of Thy peace.

*Feldeinsamkeit* is one of Charles Ives many settings of German poetry. It was composed in 1897. Brahms had also set this poem, by **Hermann Allmers**, as his Op 86 No 2, but Ives's treatment is one of his most ravishing songs. Ives remembered with pride the composer George W Chadwick remarking that it was almost as good as the Brahms, and composed from an "almost opposite approach [...] for the active tranquillity of the outdoor beauty of nature is harder to express than just quietude".

Ich ruhe still im hohen grünen Gras  
Und sende lange meinen Blick nach oben,  
Von Grillen rings umschwirrt ohn Unterlaß,  
Von Himmelsbläue wundersam umwoben.

Und schönen weiße Wolken ziehn dahin  
Durchs tiefe Blau, wie schöne stille Träume;  
Mir ist, als ob ich längst gestorben bin  
Und ziehe selig mit durch ew'ge Räume.

*In Summer Fields* (translated by Henry Grafton Chapman)

Quite still I lie where green the grass and tall  
And gaze above me into depths unbounded,  
By voices of the woodland a constant call,  
And by the wondrous blue of Heav'n surrounded.

The lovely snow-white clouds drift far and wide,  
Like silent dreams through deeps of azure wending,  
I feel as though I long ago had died,  
To drift with them through realms of bliss unending.

*Sure on this shining night* is an art song by **Samuel Barber** from his 1938 song cycle *Four Songs*. The work's text is taken from the poem *Descriptions of Elysium* by **James Agee**. Barber himself later reworked the song into the choral arrangement we are singing tonight. One of his most frequently performed works, it displays Barber's neo-romantic lyricism with its classically oriented formal structure and carefully crafted interplay between the voices that emphasizes canonic imitation.

Sure on this shining night / Of star-made shadows round,  
Kindness must watch for me / This side the ground.

The late year lies down the north. / All is healed, all is health.  
High summer holds the earth. / Hearts all whole.

Sure on this shining night / I weep for wonder  
Wandering far alone / Of shadows on the stars.

**Stephen Paulus** is the youngest composer in this concert. He discovered this tune in a shape-note hymn book, set to a folk song called *The Lone Wild Bird*. He asked his friend and frequent collaborator Michael Dennis Browne to write new words for it, and *The Road Home* was the outcome.

Tell me, where is the road I can call my own,  
That I left, that I lost, so long ago?  
All these years I have wandered, oh, when will I know  
There's a way, there's a road that will lead me home?

After wind, after rain, when the dark is done.  
As I wake from a dream in the gold of day,  
Through the air there's a calling from far away,  
There's a voice I can hear that will lead me home.

Rise up, follow me, come away, is the call,  
With the love in your heart as the only song;  
There is no such beauty as where you belong:  
Rise up, follow me, I will lead you home.

*Make Our Garden Grow* is the closing number from **Leonard Bernstein's** operetta *Candide*.

Probing the existential questions that haunt us was a hallmark of Bernstein both as a person and composer. He was not satisfied unless he was immersed in major issues, and questioning the status quo, often with irreverence and insouciance. That was what made Bernstein imbue his music with such depth. How many people would even consider turning Voltaire's satirical novella from 1759, *Candide*, into musical theatre, let alone jump at the opportunity?

The idea was to draw parallels between Voltaire's satirical portrayal of the Catholic Church's blatant hypocrisy and violence and the inquisition-like tactics then being implemented by the U.S. government under the House of Representatives' House Un-American Activities Committee. In the context of this story, any utopia is suspect, and the verdant domestic future *Candide* imagines in the finale is no exception. As soon as the company has sung it into being, the bubble is burst. But when the song is unlinked from the story, the audience is allowed to indulge in its lovely sincerity. As Jamie Bernstein has written, "the soaring chorus seems to be telling us that growing our garden is a metaphor for the flowering of mankind itself."

You've been a fool, and so have I,  
But let's be man and wife.  
And let us try, before we die,  
To make some sense of life.

*We're neither pure, nor wise, nor good  
We'll do the best we know.  
We'll build our house and chop our wood  
And make our garden grow.*

I thought the world was sugar cake  
For so our master said.  
But, now I'll teach my hands to bake  
Our loaf of daily bread.

*We're neither pure, nor wise, nor good [etc]*

Let dreamers dream what worlds they please  
Those Edens can't be found.  
The sweetest flowers, the fairest trees  
Are grown in solid ground.

*We're neither pure, nor wise, nor good [etc]*

## Biographies

### **Filippo Turkheimer** Baritone

Filippo Turkheimer studied at the Universität Mozarteum Salzburg and read Music at Oxford University, where he sang in the Choir of New College. He currently studies with Robert Dean.

He recently appeared as *Jephte* (Montéclair) with the Mozarteum Baroque Orchestra and Choir, and as Count Almaviva (*Le Nozze di Figaro*) with the Mozarteum OpernStudio. He joined Teodor Currentzis's ensemble *Utopia* for Don Giovanni at last year's Salzburg Festival.

Upcoming engagements include a tour of Gustav Mahler's Rückert-Lieder with the Gustav Mahler Academy Orchestra and Sir John Eliot Gardiner, as well as a recital of songs by Mahler and Jean Sibelius with Finnish pianist Pauliina Tukkiainen, both presented as part of the Gustav Mahler Academy in Bolzano, Italy.

## **Dónal McCann** Piano

Originally from Belfast, Dónal read music at King's College, Cambridge, where he was an academic and organ scholar, and accompanied the choir in daily chapel services, as well as in recordings, broadcasts and extensive tours, including to America and Australia. Prior to this, Dónal was the Andrew Lloyd Webber Scholar at Eton College, where he gained the FRCO with the Limpus Prize, subsequently being nominated for the Silver Medal of the Worshipful Company of Musicians. The following year he won the inaugural Dame Gillian Weir Medal at the Northern Ireland International Organ Competition.

Dónal studied piano at the Royal Irish Academy of Music in Dublin, and organ with Professor Gerard Gillen at St Mary's Pro Cathedral. He has performed as a soloist with the Ulster Orchestra and the Academy of Ancient Music, and has given many recitals in the UK and abroad.

He is currently Director of Chapel Music at Winchester College.

## **James Brown** Conductor

James Brown was organ scholar of Girton College, Cambridge before doing further study of organ with Lionel Rogg at the Geneva Conservatoire, Switzerland. After two years as Guest Artist in Residence at the First United Methodist Church, Lubbock, Texas, USA, he returned to England where he was Organist of Dean Close School.

In 2006 James moved to Oxford where he is Organist of the historic University Church, and teaches organ at Abingdon School as well as pursuing freelance work as an organist and pianist. He is also Organist at St John's College. In 2023 he was appointed Director of Music at Mansfield College.

James has given recitals in the UK, USA, Belgium and Switzerland, and appeared on both BBC radio and television. He also performs solo classical piano recitals for Cunard, P&O, and Fred Olsen cruise lines, and appeared as the solo classical artist on the Cunard flagship Queen Mary 2 twice in 2023.

James has been conducting the Cherwell Singers since 2007.

# The Cherwell Singers

## **Soprano**

Sian Cattell  
Stephanie Garner \*  
Alice Green  
Judith Homann  
Janet Johnson  
Sreya Rao  
Elina Screen  
Eve-Marie Wenger

## **Tenor**

Richard Goodall  
Simon Murray  
David Read  
Brian Tibbels

## **Alto**

Elizabeth Kreager  
Ann Leggett  
Wendy Morris  
Claire Naylor  
Anna Orlowska

## **Bass**

David Gillespie  
Paul Hodges  
Simon Jones  
Brian Leach  
Simeon Mitchell  
Kieran Suchet

\* Soloist in *The Road Home*

If you are interested in joining us please contact James Brown at:

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Please visit our web site to learn more about the choir, and listen to some of our recordings online. Use the web form to register yourself on our email list, to ensure you receive notification and full details of future concerts.

[www.cherwellsingers.org](http://www.cherwellsingers.org)