

The Cherwell Singers

present

The Long Day Closes

Music for evening and the night

Dónal McCann
James Brown

organ & piano
conductor

Sunday, 21st June, 2026
Chapel of Mansfield College, Oxford

Programme

Te lucis ante terminum I	Thomas Tallis
O Lord the maker of all thing	William Mundy
In pace	John (<i>aka</i> William) Blitheman

(Organ solo)

Ach bleib bei uns, Herr Jesu Christ, BWV 649	J.S. Bach
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Draw on, sweet night	John Wilbye
<i>Evening Hymn</i>	Henry Purcell

Te lucis ante terminum	Matthew Martin
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Interval

Save Us, O Lord	Edward Bairstow
<i>Evening Song</i>	Zoltán Kodály
<i>Abendlied</i> , Op.69 no.3	Josef Rheinberger

<i>Evening Prayer</i>	Engelbert Humperdinck
Hail, gladdening light	Craig Sellar Lang

(Piano solo)

Nocturne in B flat	John Field
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Sure on this shining night	Samuel Barber
<i>All through the night</i>	Trad, arr. Robert Chilcott

Abide with me	Gilbert M. Martin
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The audience is asked not to applaud within the groups of pieces

Dónal McCann	organ & piano
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The Long Day Closes

Music for evening and the night

June 21st is the longest day of the year, and to herald the start of the longest night the Cherwell Singers present “The Long Day Closes”, a programme of music chosen to mark evening and night-time.

The evening church offices of Compline and Evensong have inspired some classics of choral music, and these will be represented by works by Tallis and Blitheman on the one hand and Bairstow and the contemporary composer Matthew Martin on the other.

Not all music featured will be written for the church however, and there are several secular numbers represented in the concert, including the extended madrigal “Draw on sweet night” by John Wilbye, and song arrangements by Kodály and Samuel Barber.

Joining us once again on piano as well as organ will be Dónal McCann, who will perform two solo works in line with the theme of the concert.

We are pleased you have joined us here in Mansfield College Chapel to celebrate the change of seasons and mark the longest day in music.

James Brown

Notes

Night-time evokes contrasting emotions. On the one hand, it gives us an opportunity to rest and recover from the efforts of the previous day and prepare for the day to come; but on the other hand, it is a time of vulnerability and hence fear. In times when religion was more integrated into normal life, it became natural to invoke the deity, giving thanks for rest and praying for protection to enable the rest to be safe. The falling of night is also used to signify death (as in *Abide with me*, which ends our concert). Church offices for the evening (Compline, and later, Evensong) concentrated on prayer for safety, and the same theme appears in more domestic prayers, such as those set by Kodály, Rheinberger, and Humperdinck in the later part of the concert.

Thomas Tallis (c.1505-1585) flourished through all the changes in church practice he experienced in his post at the Chapel Royal, and so, like Byrd and their other contemporaries, set words in Latin as well as English.

Te lucis ante terminum is one of the hymns of the early church, of unknown authorship, and Tallis published two settings in 1575. They both alternate plainchant with a full choral setting of the same melody; we are singing the slightly more elaborate setting which uses plainchant of the viiith tone (often wrongly referred to as the “festal” version). The plainsong is in the soprano.

Te lucis ante terminum,	To Thee before the close of day,
Rerum Creator poscimus,	Creator of the world, we pray
Ut solita clementia	That, with Thy wonted favour, Thou
Sis praesul ad custodiam.	Wouldst be our guard and keeper now.
Procul recedant somnia,	From all ill dreams defend our sight,
Et noctium phantasmata:	From fears and terrors of the night;
Hostemque nostrum comprime,	Withhold from us our ghostly foe,
Ne polluantur corpora.	That spot of sin we may not know.
Praesta pater omnipotens	O Father, that we ask be done,
Per Jesum Christum Dominum	Through Jesus Christ, Thine only Son,
Qui tecum in perpetuum	Who, with the Holy Ghost and Thee,
Regnat cum Sancto Spiritu	Doth live and reign eternally.
Amen	Amen.

(Anon, trans. J M Neale (1818-1866))

William Mundy (1529-1591) became a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal in 1564, but little is known of his life. Like Tallis, Sheppard, and Byrd he wrote Latin masses and motets or English services (six) and anthems (some of them verse anthems) as times required.

The date of *O Lord, the Maker of all thing* is unknown, and the setting has also been attributed to Henry VIII, unlikely though this is. The words are an anonymous translation of *Te lucis ante terminum*.

O Lord, the maker of all thing, we pray thee now in this evening
Us to defend through thy mercy from all deceit of our enemy.
Let neither us deluded be, good Lord, with dream or fantasy;
Our hearts waking in thee thou keep that we in sin fall not on sleep.
O Father, through thy blessed Son, grant us this our petition,
To whom with the Holy Ghost always in heaven and earth be laud and praise.

John Blitheman (c.1525-1591), was an English composer, priest and probably a singer, also referred to as William Blitheman. Less than twenty of his works are known. We know nothing about his early life, but from 1555 he was chaplain at Christ Church, Oxford, becoming master of the choristers in 1564 and a lay clerk around 1569. He became organist of the Chapel Royal in 1585 on the death of Thomas Tallis, and held this post until his death. John Bull was his pupil there, and took the job in turn when Blitheman died.

The motet *In pace* is a setting of a responsory to be sung at compline throughout Lent. Although it alternates plainchant and harmony, in the same way as the Tallis above, in this case the choral sections are not settings of the plainchant melody.

In pace,
In idipsum, dormiam et requiescam.
Si dederō somnum oculis meis,
et palpebris meis dormitationem,
dormiam et requiescam.
Gloria Patri et Filio,
Et Spiritui Sancto.

In peace,
In true peace I shall sleep and rest.
If I give slumber to my eyes
and to my eyelids drowsiness,
I shall sleep and rest.
Glory to the Father and the Son,
And to the Holy Ghost.

Little need be said about **J. S. Bach** (1685-1750) who is universally regarded as one of the greatest composers, and especially pre-eminent when writing for the organ - though we should remember that he also wrote a great amount of equally important choral and instrumental music.

In 1725 Bach wrote a solo cantata for Easter Monday (BWV 6). In 1747 or 1748, he transcribed the third movement, *Ach bleib bei uns, Herr Jesu Christ*, with little alteration as a chorale prelude (BWV 649) for publication as one of six such transcriptions usually known as the *Schübler Chorales*. The words of this movement of the cantata are the same as those of the setting *Abendlied* by Rheinberger, to be performed later in this concert.

John Wilbye (1574-1638) was the son of a tanner in Suffolk. He made his career working as a musician for several Suffolk landowners. One of these also had interests in London, so Wilbye was also involved there. It was in London that his two books of madrigals were published, the first in 1598.

Virtually all of Wilbye's compositions are madrigals, and *Draw on , Sweet Night* is one of the longest, and also best known, of them. The words are wholly non-religious.

Draw on, Sweet Night, best friend unto those cares
That do arise from painful melancholy.
My life so ill through want of comfort fares
That unto thee I consecrate it wholly.

Sweet Night, draw on! My griefs when they be told
To shades and darkness find some ease from paining.
And while thou all in silence dost enfold
I then shall have best time for my complaining.

Henry Purcell (1659-1695) was the greatest of a family of musicians. As a boy he sang in the choir of the Chapel Royal; at the age of 18 he was appointed Composer in Ordinary for the royal violins (i.e. orchestra), and at a mere 20 years of age he became organist of Westminster Abbey.

Evening Hymn is a setting of words by Dr William Fuller as a simple melody over a ground bass. The ground is five bars long, and so much of the melody is also in five bar units though at times it gets out of step with the ground.

Now, now that the sun hath veil'd his light
And bid the world goodnight;
To the soft bed my body I dispose
But where shall my soul repose?
Dear, dear God, even in Thy arms
And can there be any so sweet security!
Then to thy rest, O my soul!
And singing, praise the mercy
That prolongs thy days.

Alleluya!

Matthew Martin (1976-) read Music at Magdalen College, Oxford before studying at the Royal Academy of Music and with Marie-Claire Alain in Paris. Matthew spent much of his early life immersed in cathedral music, and in 2010, after spending six years as Assistant Master of Music at Westminster Cathedral, he decided to focus more on composition, since when he has been commissioned to write music for many well-known choirs.

Te lucis ante terminum sets the same words as the first item in this concert, using plainsong of the viith tone as the melody; the setting was written for the Exon Singers.

Sir Edward Cuthbert Bairstow (1874-1946) was an English organist and composer in the Anglican church music tradition. He studied the organ at Balliol College, Oxford, and then at Westminster Abbey. After holding posts in London, Wigan and Leeds, he served as organist of York Minster from 1913 to his death, when he was succeeded by his former pupil Francis Jackson. He also served on the advisory board of the BBC in its early days.

The anthem *Save us, O Lord* was composed in 1902 setting words from the antiphon for the office of compline, and is very typical of Anglican church music of its time.

Save us, O Lord, waking, Guard us sleeping
That awake we may watch with Christ, and asleep we may rest in peace.
Amen

Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967) grew up in rural Hungary where he had ample opportunity to become acquainted with the rich traditions of native folk music that played such an important part in his musical life. With his friend Béla Bartók he began a serious effort to collect and archive Hungarian folksong. Kodály was also an innovator in primary music education.

His arrangement of the Northern Hungarian song, *Esti Dal*, or *Evening Song*, has achieved huge popularity through translation into many languages, and some say it is his best-known work.

Peaceful woods, the dusk descending,	Thus I lay there, silent, praying:
Fragrant now with Summer's ending;	"Lord, I wander ever straying;
There I rested, and e'er sleeping,	Wand'ring through the world, yet knowing
Praying, sought His sweet safe-keeping.	Thou wilt guard me, and my going.

"Let not darkness from Thee hide me,
May Thine angels watch beside me;
Guard us all while we are sleeping,
Safe for ever in thy keeping!"

Josef Rheinberger (1839-1901) is the only well-known composer from the small country of Lichtenstein. He wrote choral music distinguished by masterful constructional technique and by an effective command of counterpoint and formal structures. He also wrote a considerable number of organ sonatas which are still in regular use. His harmony is very much of his time, with its use of chromaticism and altered chords; the melodies are songlike and frequently inspired by Gregorian plainchant.

Perhaps the best-known of Rheinberger's sacred compositions is his motet for six voices, known as *Abendlied*, which had its origins in a student piece of 1855. The key change at the opening and the imploring melodic line provide examples of the subtle compositional skills which even the young Rheinberger had at his command. The words are from St Luke's gospel, though being used in a very different context.

Bleib bei uns, denn es will Abend werden, und der Tag hat sich geneiget.

Stay with us, for it is nearly evening, and the day is almost over.

Engelbert Humperdinck (1854-1921) was a German composer, best known for his opera *Hänsel und Gretel* (1893). His parents disapproved of his plans for a career in music and encouraged him to study architecture, but in 1876, he won a scholarship that enabled him to go to Munich to study music. Later he met Richard Wagner and worked with him for some years.

Hänsel und Gretel was initially a set of songs for a puppet show, but was later expanded to become a full opera based off the fairy tale by the Grimm Brothers. The *Evening Prayer* of the two children lost in the woods is the best-known part, and is often performed in isolation.

Abends, will ich schlafen gehn,
Vierzehn Engel um mich stehn:
Zwei zu meinen Häupten,
Zwei zu meinen Füßen,
Zwei zu meiner Rechten,
Zwei zu meiner Linken,
Zwei die mich decken,
Zwei, die mich wecken,
Zwei, die mich weisen
Zu Himmels Paradeisen!

When at night I go to sleep
Fourteen angels watch do keep
Two my head are guarding
Two my feet are guiding
Two are on my right hand
Two are on my left hand
Two who warmly cover
Two who o'er me hover
Two to whom 'tis given
To guide my steps to heaven

The British organist **Craig Sellar Lang** (1891-1971) was a school teacher. His many books on organ technique were influential and widely used.

This setting of *Hail Gladdening Light* is for congregation and choir – one imagines the chapel of the school where he taught as the setting. The words were translated by John Keble from the third century Greek hymn, *Phos Hilaron*, the earliest Christian hymn recorded outside the Bible that is still in use today. Unlike most of the other words in this concert, this is a hymn of praise rather than a prayer for safety.

Hail, gladdening Light, of His pure glory poured,
Who is th'Immortal Father, Heavenly, Blest;
Holiest of Holies, Jesus Christ our Lord!

Now are we come to the sun's hour of rest;
The lights of evening round us shine,
We hymn the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit divine.

Worthiest art Thou at all times to be sung,
With undefiled tongue,
Son of our God, Giver of life, Alone;
Therefore in all the world Thy glories, All things own.

John Field (1782-1837) was an Irish pianist, composer and teacher born in Dublin, receiving his early education in the city, and later going to London to study with Muzio Clementi. He is widely credited as the inventor of the Nocturne. In 1802 he went on tour with Clementi through Europe to Russia, where he decided to remain for the rest of his life. He returned on and off to Western Europe for medical treatment before his death in Moscow.

Nocturne in B flat: As the name suggests, a Nocturne was thought of as a piece of music to be played in the evening. While many of his contemporaries wrote in a similar style, Field was the first to use the term to apply to a piece featuring a cantabile melody over an arpeggiated accompaniment, with the melody being restated with embellishments and elaborations. It was Field who inspired Chopin to compose his own more famous Nocturnes.

Sure on this shining night is an art song by **Samuel Barber** (1910-1981) 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.

Robert Chilcott (1955-) is a British choral composer, conductor, and singer, born in Devon and now based in Oxfordshire. He was a member of the King's Singers from 1985 to 1997, since when he has concentrated on composition.

All through the night is a translation of a Welsh poem by John Ceiriog Hughes, set to a traditional Welsh tune collected in the eighteenth century.

Sleep, my child, and peace attend thee
All through the night;
Guardian angels God will send thee
All through the night.
Soft the drowsy hours are creeping,
Hill and vale in slumber sleeping,
I my loving vigil keeping,
All through the night.

While the moon her watch is keeping
All through the night;
While the weary world is sleeping
All through the night.
Over thy spirit gently stealing,
Visions of delight revealing,
Breathes a pure and holy feeling,
All through the night.

Gilbert M. Martin (1941-) is an American composer of choral and organ music. He also travels throughout the USA to teach and conduct choirs and musical ensembles.

Abide with me is a hymn by Henry Francis Lyte. There are two stories about its origin – one says he wrote it at the deathbed of a dying friend in 1820, and the other that he wrote it facing his own death from tuberculosis in 1847. The usual tune was written by William Henry Monk.

Abide with me: fast falls the eventide;
the darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

I need thy presence every passing hour.
What but thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who like thyself my guide and strength can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me.

I fear no foe with thee at hand to bless,
ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if thou abide with me.

Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes.
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.
Heaven's morning breaks and earth's vain shadows flee;
in life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

Biographies

Dónal McCann Organ and 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. From 2006-2024 he was a tenor lay clerk in the choir of New College, Oxford, and in 2023 he was appointed Director of Music at Mansfield College.

James has given recitals in the UK, USA, Belgium and Switzerland, and has 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

Emily Bache
Sian Cattell
Hester Crombie
Judith Homann
Janet Johnson
Sreya Rao
Elina Screen
Lucy Watson

Alto

Jenny Ayres
Flora Carnwath
Elizabeth Kreager
Ann Leggett
Claire Naylor
Anna Orlowska

Tenor

Simon Murray
David Read
Justin Snoxall
Brian Tibbels

Bass

Tony Blakeborough
David Gillespie
Simeon Mitchell
Kieran Suchet

If you are interested in joining us please contact James Brown at:
director@cherwellsingers.org

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.

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