

KINGS PLACE

Broken reflections, Saimaa Canal, Russia | Photo by Nihara

The Carice Singers Nordic Reflections

Thu 3 Jun | 7.30pm

Programme

Edward Elgar *My love dwelt in a northern land*

Jean Sibelius *Min rastas raataa*

(‘What the thrush toils’)

Män från slätten och havet

(‘Men from plain and sea’)

Elgar *Evening Scene*

The Fountain

Sibelius *Rakastava* (‘The lover’)

Elgar *Love*

Serenade

Sibelius *Sortunut ääni* (‘The broken voice’)

Saarella palaa (‘Fire on the island’)

Elgar *Owls (An Epitaph)*

O wild West Wind!

Sibelius *Sydämeni laulu* (‘Song of my heart’)

Venematka (‘The boat journey’)

Matthew Whittall *Lauantaisauna*

(‘Saturday sauna’)

This performance will last approx. one hour with no interval

The Carice Singers | **George Parris** director

Soprano

Ellie Sperling

Rachel Haworth

Danni O’Neill

Alto

Rosie Parker

Sophie Overin

Chris Mitchell

Tenor

Jacob Ewens

Toby Ward

Hugh Beckwith

Bass

David Le Prevost

Nathan Harrison

Thomas Lowen

Programme Notes

Nordic Reflections

Should we be in the mood for some Elgar or Sibelius, their choral songs might not be our first choice for listening. Alongside the symphonic works now so iconic, these pieces appear as miniatures composed exclusively for amateur performers. With the Sibelius songs come the added difficulty of language (either Finnish, or Sibelius’s mother tongue, Swedish) which means that they are rarely performed outside of Finland and even less so by professional vocal ensembles. As someone who as a teenager was immediately drawn to Elgar’s music and concurrently began to sing his part-songs, I almost felt a predestined affinity for Sibelius’s choral music as I gradually discovered it during my time in Finland. The idea to programme them in a purely choral context leapt out at me as, despite them coming from opposite ends of Europe, I began to notice how they shared certain influences, tendencies and idiosyncrasies which not only show them in a different light but also bridges the gap between them across a Northern European space of geographies, cultures, and performance communities.

These choral songs respond to mainstream contemporaneous ideologies just as much as do the symphonic works, and since both Elgar and Sibelius were never much ones for explaining their music to anyone, the fact that there are actual texts to work with can make the task of deciphering any possible subtexts a great deal easier. For instance, Elgar’s predilection for choosing texts which often reference ‘spirits’ –

spectral or otherwise – and to ‘a distant, dreamlike sound’ hints that he may have perceived music as having some kind of supernatural property. This is a reactionary, almost childlike idea which harks back to Romantic ideals and is given its fullest expression in *O wild West Wind!*, a setting of the final stanza of Shelley’s *Ode to the West Wind*. Composed in Rome at the turn of 1908, the part-song was written while Elgar was sketching his long-awaited First Symphony, a work with which it shares a restless anxiety to expose a direct tension between music as a timelessly bewitching product of nature and the radically modern potentiality in humankind to “quicken a new birth” and attain its own perfection. And then there is *Owls (An Epitaph)*, a bewildering work dedicated to Elgar’s daughter Carice’s pet rabbit and which he described as ‘only a fantasy’, yet the fact that it also dates from this pivotal moment in his career makes the repeatedly sung phrase ‘all that can be is said’ a statement difficult to believe.

Compared with Elgar’s environment, Sibelius belonged to a society that was modernising at a drastically slower rate while still working out how to define itself culturally and politically. Yet it was this very predicament that contributed directly to Sibelius’s early success, and his choral songs played a central part in this. *Venematka*, his first published choral piece from 1893, had (as he described it) ‘a bomb-like effect’ on its first audiences. Finns were ignited by the assimilation of indigenous folklore collected in the *Kalevala* and *Kanteletar* together with elements of traditional recitation practices from Karelia (known as *runolaulu*) within a choral setting which, although highly demanding, could be widely performed. Even if the other choral works written during the 1890s (*Rakastava*, *Min rastas raataa*, *Sortunut ääni*, *Sydämeni laulu* and *Saarella palaa*) don’t possess quite the same breakthrough spirit as *Venematka*, they were equally crucial as being the first serious choral songs to follow the structure and stresses of the Finnish language at a time when Finnish was being revealed to be an ancient language capable of literary merit.

Like Elgar, Sibelius had been deeply influenced by the natural world since his childhood and nature subsequently appears as another pervasive voice in his music. In fact, as we have already seen with Elgar, Sibelius too considered music and nature to be profoundly interrelated and seems to have been interested in the expressive potentialities of a music that is



Sibelius, Sketch of *Saarella palaa* (Manuscript HUL 1400/8; staves 8–13)

charged with nature (and vice versa). On a trip to Imatrankoski (the famous rapids in Eastern Finland) in 1910, the British writer and devotee of Sibelius, Rosa Newmarch, observed how ‘Sibelius had [...] a passion for trying to catch the pedal notes of natural forces’, and in works such as *Venematka* (a song about a boat journey) we hear these very same pedal notes in the lowest extremities of the bass range. Also, on the manuscript which contains the sketches for *Saarella palaa* we see a drawing Sibelius has made of an island with a sunset reflected on the water almost contained within the musical staves and flowing into the music. Indeed, it was this quality of Sibelius’s music that gained favour among British audiences in the 1910s and which led Sibelius to exert perhaps just as much influence on a younger generation of British composers as did Elgar.

The circumstances surrounding the first performance of *Män från slätten och havet*, a setting of words by Finnish-Swedish poet Ernst Viktor Knape, demonstrates the bardic status that was prescribed upon Sibelius now at the height of his career. The piece was commissioned by a Swedish speaking educational organisation and was premiered by a massed choir of 1300 singers at a singing festival in the city of Vaasa on 30 June 1912. Three months later, Sibelius travelled to Birmingham to conduct the British premiere of his Fourth Symphony, a work he supposedly called ‘a psychological symphony’. In the same concert, Elgar conducted the premiere of *The Music Makers*, a provocative cantata concerned with the inner workings of the artist’s psyche. Even though it was the only time that these world famous contemporaries would be in the same room as each other, there is no record of them meeting, unlike the now famous encounter between Sibelius and Mahler in 1907. Quite likely, they were not aware of their mutual cognitions. **George Parris**



The Carice Singers | Photo by Kai Bäckström

Biographies

The Carice Singers was founded by George Parris in 2011 and began life performing Elgar's part-songs in the North Cotswolds. Naming itself after Elgar's only child, the choir was soon registered as a charity with the aim of supporting early-career ensemble singers. The group is also committed to promoting curiosity and appreciation for its ever-widening repertoire amongst people of all ages, just as Carice showed a quiet but resolute sense of duty in securing her father's legacy.

Today the choir is emerging as one of the most distinctive vocal ensembles in the UK, defined by its unique sound and imaginative choice of repertoire. Having made three successful early recordings with the Naxos label, the group has since recorded for the *BBC Music Magazine* and has performed live on BBC Radio 3's *In Tune*. Recent concerts have included Sounding North at the Oxford Lieder Festival and George Parris's Master's Degree recital at the Sibelius Academy Concert Hall in Helsinki, Finland. In 2021, its tenth anniversary year, The Carice Singers will give their debut concert at Kings Place, London, and be Ensemble in Residence at the Cheltenham Music Festival.

George Parris studied music at the University of Cambridge followed by a Master's in Musicology at the University of Oxford. In 2017 he moved to Finland to begin studying Choral Conducting at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki. As well as being Artistic Director of The Carice Singers, he is also Artistic Director of the award-winning Finnish choir Spira Ensemble and Choir Director at Olaus Petri Church in Helsinki. Parris has been invited to work with the Croatian Radio Choir and Coro Casa da Música in Portugal.

thecaricesingers.co.uk



George Parris | Photo by Robert Piwko

Text & Translations

Edward Elgar *My love dwelt in a northern land*

Andrew Lang (1844–1912); first publ. in *Century Magazine* 1882

My love dwelt in a northern land,
A dim tower in a forest green
Was his, and far away the sand
And gray wash of the waves were seen
The woven forest-boughs between.

And through the Northern summer night
The sunset slowly died away,
And herds of strange deer, silver-white,
Came gleaming through the forest gray,
And fled like ghosts before the day.

And oft, that month we watch'd the moon
Wax great and white o'er wood and lawn,
And wane, with waning of the June,
Till, like a brand for battle drawn,
She fell, and flamed in a wild dawn.

I know not if the forest green
Still girdles round that castle gray,
I know not if the boughs between
The white deer vanish ere the day:
The grass above my Love is green;
His heart is colder than the clay.

Jean Sibelius *Min rastas raataa*

Kanteletar I: 219

*Min rastas raataa,
sen pyyhyt pyytää,
onneton ottaa,
vaivainen varastaa,
lapiolle laittaa,
telikälle työntää,
oven alle peittää,
vastalla kattaa.
Talonpoika takoo,
keihäitä keittää,
poika oottaa,
tyttöjä tuolla,
savisissa saappahissa,
kirjavissa kintahissa.
Meren römä rönky,
tuulonen tuulee,
kuningas kuulee,
vieltä virstalta,
kuuelta kulmalta,
seitsemältä selkoselta,
kaheksalta kankahalta.*

What the thrush toils,
the partridge takes,
the luckless one grabs,
the troubled one thieves,
the shovelling onto spades,
pushing onto sleighs,
hiding under doors,
covering with birch-whisks.
The peasant is hammering,
forging implements,
the boy is waiting,
for girls over yonder,
in his muddy boots,
in his many-coloured mittens
The sea rumbles,
the wind blows,
the king can hear
from five leagues off,
from six regions,
from seven wildernesses,
from eight forests.

Sibelius *Män från slätten och havet*

Ernst Viktor Knape (1873-1929), from the collection *Akvareller (Watercolours)*, first published 1907.

*Män från slätten och havet,
går eder längtan långt?
Floderna gå genom slätten.
Vindarna gå över havet.
Längre vår längtan går!*

*Män från slätten och havet,
finner ej sinnet ro?
Rastlöst forsarna sjunga.
Rastlöst häver sig havet.
Mindre är sinnet i ro.*

*Män från slätten och havet,
finner ej längtan hem?
Floden går aldrig tillbaka.
Vindarna bliva i fjärran.
All vår längtan till hemmet går,
en gång när trötta vi varda.*

*Hembygd, hembygd, solig och fager
står du i dagens och nattens dröm,
där mellan slätternas åkrar och ängar glider mot havet en
evig ström.
Ständigt bygdens söner
bort mot slätternas rand,
[emot blånande rand, bort.]
vår längtan drar oss och oro jagar bort,
långt bort till fjärran land.
Gåttfulla längtan, sen tusende år
är du vårt arv från släkte till släkte,
intet, dig stäckte,
intet dig hämmar den dag som går.*

Men from plain and sea,
how far does your longing go?
The rivers run across the plain.
The wind blows over the sea.
Our longing goes so far!

Men from plain and sea,
does your mind not find rest?
Restlessly the rapids sing.
Restlessly heaves the sea.
Less is the mind at peace.

Men from plain and sea,
does your longing not find a home?
The river never returns.
The winds stay in the distance.
All our longing turns homewards,
once, when we become tired.

Homeland, O homeland, sunny and fair
there you stand in the day's and night's dream,
there between fields and meadows of the plain
glides an eternal stream to the sea.
Always the local sons [gaze] far into the distance,
away to the edge of the plains,
[against blueish margins, away.]
our longing pulls us and restlessness chases away,
far away to the distant land.
Enigmatic longing, for a thousand years
you have been our heritage from generation to
generation, nothing stopped you,
never inhibited by the passing day.

Elgar Evening Scene

Coventry Patmore (1823–1896), *The River* (vv. 33–35)

The sheep-bell tolleth curfew-time;
The gnats, a busy rout,
Fleck the warm air; the dismal owl
Shouteth a dreamy shout;
The voiceless bat, more felt than seen,
Is flitting round about;
The aspen leaflets scarcely stir;
The river seems to think;
Athwart the dusk, broad primroses
Look coldly from the brink,
Where, listening to the freshet's noise,
The quiet cattle drink.

The bees boom past; the white moths rise
Like spirits from the ground;
The gray-flies hum their weary tune,
A distant, dream-like sound;
and far, far off, to the slumberous eve,
Bayeth an old guard-hound.

Elgar The Fountain

Henry Vaughan (1621–1695), from *Regeneration* (vv. 6–7)

The unthrift sun shot vital gold,
A thousand pieces:
And heaven its azure did unfold,
Chequered with snowy fleeces;
The air was all in spice,
And every bush
A garland wore: thus fed my eyes,
But all the world lay hush.

Only a little fountain lent
Some use for ears,
And on the dumb shades language spent
The music of her tears.

Sibelius Rakastava (The Lover)

Kanteletar I: 173

*Miss' on, kussa minun hyväni,
miss' asuvi armahani,
missä istuvi iloni,
kulla maalla marjaseni?
Ei kuulu ääntävän ahoilla,
lyövän leikkiä lehoissa,
ei kuulu saloilta soitto,
kukunta ei kunnahilta.
Oisko armas astumassa
marjani matelemassa,
oma kulta kulkemassa,
valkia vaeltamassa;
Toisin torveni puhuisi,
vaaran rinnat vastoaisi,
saisi salot sanelemista,
joka kumpu kukkumista,
lehot leikkiä pitäisi,
ahot ainaista iloa.*

*Täst' on kulta kulkenunna,
täst' on mennyt mielitetty,
tästä armas astununna,
valkia vaeltanunna;
täss' on astunut aholla,
tuoss' on istunut kivellä.
Kivi on paljo kirkkahampi,
paasi toistansa parempi
kangas kahta kaunihimpi,
lehto viittä lempiämpi,
korpi kuutta kukkahampi,
koko metsä mieluisampi,
tuon on kultani kulusta,
armahani astunnasta.*

Where, O where is my beloved,
Where is now my sweetheart staying,
Where now sits my joy and comfort,
Where is my sweet berry's homestead?
I hear not her voice on meadows,
Nor in leafy groves rejoicing,
Nor her music in the woodland,
Nor her singing on the hillocks.
Is my sweetheart out a-wand'ring,
My beloved roaming yonder,
My sweet berry walking woodlands,
My own fairest out a-rambling?
Then my horn would ring out boldly,
And the hills would loudly echo,
Full of fairest sound the woodland,
Full of singing all the hillocks,
And the leafy groves rejoicing,
Merry voices on the meadows.

This is where my sweetheart wandered,
This where my beloved rambled,
This is where my love went walking,
And my fairest came a-roaming.
This is where she walked the meadows,
There the stone that she sat down on.
Now the stone is so much brighter,
And the boulder so much better,
And the pinewood twice as lovely,
And the grove five times as gentle,
Six times finer this wild forest,
And more pleasant all the woodland
Since my sweetheart wandered through it,
Since my fairest went a-roaming.

*Hyvää iltaa lintuseni,
hyvää iltaa kultaseni,
hyvää iltaa nyt minun oma armahani!
Tanssi, tanssi lintuseni,
tanssi, tanssi kultaseni,
tanssi, tanssi nyt minun oma armahani!
Seiso, seiso lintuseni,
Seiso, seiso kultaseni,
Seiso, seiso nyt minun oma armahani!
Anna kättä lintuseni,
anna kättä kultaseni,
anna kättä nyt minun oma armahani!*

*Käsi kaulaan lintuseni,
käsi kaulaan kultaseni,
halausta kultaseni,
halausta nyt minun oma armahani!
Suuta, suuta lintuseni,
suuta, suuta kultaseni,
halausta lintuseni,
halausta nyt minun oma armahani!*

*Suuta, sutta, minun oma armahani!
Jää hyvästi lintuseni,
jää hyvästi kultaseni,
jää hyvästi nyt minun oma armahani!*

O good evening, my sweet birdling,
O good evening, my sweet darling,
O good evening now to thee, my beloved!
Dance, O dance thou, my sweet birdling,
Dance, O dance thou, my sweet darling,
Dance, O dance thou now for me, my beloved!
Stand, O stand by me, my birdling,
Stand, O stand by me, my darling,
Stand, O stand now close by me, my beloved!
Give thy hand, O my sweet birdling,
Give thy hand, O my sweet darling,
Give thy hand thou now to me, my beloved!

Arms around my neck, my birdling,
Arms around my neck, my darling.
O embrace me, my sweet birdling,
O embrace me now, my best beloved!
Kiss me, kiss me, my sweet birdling,
Kiss me, kiss me, my sweet darling.
O embrace me, my sweet birdling,
O embrace me now, my best beloved!

Kiss me, kiss me, my best beloved!
Fare thee well now, my sweet birdling,
Fare thee well now, my sweet darling,
Fare thee well now, my best beloved!

Elgar Love

Arthur Maquarie (1874–1955)

Like the rosy northern glow
Flushing on a moonless night
Where the world is level snow,
So thy light.

In my time of outer gloom
Thou didst come, a tender lure;
Thou, when life was but a tomb,
Beamedst pure.

Thus I looked to heaven again,
Yearning up with eager eyes,
As sunflowers after dreary rain
Drink the skies.

Oh glow on and brighter glow,
Let me ever gaze on thee,
Lest I lose warm hope and so
Cease to be.

Elgar Serenade

Nickolai Vilenkin (1855–1937) ('Minsky'), transl. Rosa Newmarch

Dreams without grief,
Once they are broken, come not again.
Across the sky the dark clouds sweep,
And all is dark and drear above;
The bare trees toss their arms and weep.
Rest on, and do not wake, dear love,
Since glad dreams haunt your slumbers deep,
Why should you scatter them in vain?

Happy is he, when Autumn falls,
Who feels the dream-kiss of the Spring;
And happy he in prison walls
Who dreams of freedom's rescuing;
But woe to him who vainly calls
Through sleepless nights for ease from pain!

Sibelius Sortunut ääni (The Broken Voice)

Kanteletar I: 57

*Mikä sorti äänen suuren,
äänen suuren ja sorian,
äänen kaunihin kaotti,
jok' ennen jokena juoksi,
vesivirtana vilasi,
lammikona lailatteli?
Suru sorti äänen suuren,
äänen suuren ja sorian,
äänen armahan alenti;
jottei nyt jokena juokse,
vesivirtana vilaja,
lammikkona lailattele.*

What oppressed the voice so great
the voice so great and graceful
the voice so far away and lost,
which before like a river flowed,
darted like a little brook,
lay like a small lake?
Sorrow oppressed the voice so great,
the voice so great and graceful,
brought down the voice so lovely;
which now doesn't flow like a river,
does not dart like a brook,
does not lie like a small lake.

Sibelius Saarella palaa (A Fire on the Island)

Kanteletar I: 186

*Tuli saarella palavi;
Kenpä tuolla tulta poltti?
Sulho tuolla tulta poltti.
Mitä sulho raatelevi?
Korjoansa kirjottavi.
Mitä tuolla korjasella?
Neittä tuolla korjasella.
Mitä neito raatelevi?
Kultakangasta kutoo,
Neito hopeaista helkyttää.*

A fire was lit on the island;
Who lit the fire there?
The groom lit the fire.
Why did the groom do this?
He is decorating his sleigh.
Why is he decorating his sleigh?
For the maiden to ride on.
What is the maiden doing there?
The maiden is weaving a golden fabric,
With a silver shine.

Elgar Owls (An epitaph)

Edward Elgar (1857–1934)

What is that? Nothing;
The leaves must fall, and falling, rustle;
That is all;
They are dead
As they fall, --
Dead at the foot of the tree;
All that can be is said.
What is it? Nothing.

What is that? Nothing;
A wild thing hurt that mourns in the night,
And it cries
In its dread,
Till it lies
Dead at the foot of the tree;
All the can be is said.
What is it? Nothing.

What is that? Ah!
A marching slow of unseen feet,
That is all;
But a bier, spread
With a pall,
And a bier
Is now at the foot of the tree;
All that could be is said;
Is it – what? Nothing.

Elgar O wild west wind!

Percy Byssche Shelley (1792–1822), Ode to the West Wind
(v.1.1 & v.5)

O wild west wind!
Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own?
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth;
And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to awakened Earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind!

Sibelius Sydämeni laulu (Song of My Heart)

Alexis Kivi (1834–72) From *Seitsemän veljestä* ('The Seven Brothers') – first novel in Finnish

*Tuonen lehto, öinen lehto,
Siell'on hieno hietakehto,
sinnepä lapseni saatan.
Siell'on lapsen lysti olla,
Tuonen herran vainiolla
kaitsea Tuonelan karjaa.*

*Siell'on lapsen lysti olla,
illan tullen tuuditella
helmassa Tuonelan immen.
Onpa kullan lysti olla,
kultakehdoss' kellahdella,
kuullella kehrääjälintu.*

*Tuonen viita, rauhan viita,
kaukana on vaino, riita,
kaukana kavala maailma.*

Glade of Tuoni, dusky glade
There a soft and sandy cradle
Where I shall bring my child.
There it is good for the child to be,
There in Tuoni's master's meadows,
Tending to Tuoni's flocks.

There the child can sleep so sweetly,
When the evening comes, lulled
In the lap of Tuonela's maiden.
There the child can sleep so sweetly,
Rocked in a golden cradle
Dreaming to the song of the nightjar.

Tuoni's halls, peaceful halls,
Far away is hatred and strife,
Far away is the wicked world.

Sibelius Venematka (The Boat Journey)

Kalevala XL, 1-16

*Vaka vanha Väinämöinen
laskea karehtelevi
tuon on pitkän niemen päästä,
kylän kurjan kuuluvilta,
laski laulellen vesiä,
ilon lyöen lainehia.*

*Neiet niemien nenissä
katselevat, kuuntelevat:
milienee ilo merellä,
mikä laulu lainehilla,
ilo entistä parempi,
laulu muita laatusampi;*

*laski vanha Väinämöinen,
laski päivän maavesiä,
päivän toisen suovesiä,
kolmannen kosen vesiä,
laski laulellen vesiä,
ilon lyöen lainehia.*

Sturdy old Väinämöinen,
going down rippling waters
passing the point of a long headland,
and coming within earshot of a village,
with a merry song on the waters,
rejoicing on the boat.

The maidenfolk at the end of the headland
watched and listened:
“What joyful strains come off the waters?
What song is this that comes from the boat?
A joy which surpasses any other joy?
A better singing than any other?”

Onward old Väinämöinen,
Onward one day on lakes,
A second day through marshes,
A third day down the rapids.
with a merry song on the waters,
rejoicing on the boat.

Sibelius Lauantaisauna (Saturday Sauna)

Niilo Rauhala (2009) from *Sana koskettaa sanaa* ('Word touches word')

*Lauantaisauna. Paahtoleipä.
Vaikenevan hämärän läpi
jalkani etsii sinun jalkojasi,
elämä tunnustelee elämää
ja aamu on kaukana
verhojen tuolla puolen.*

Saturday sauna. Toast.
through the hushed twilight
my foot reaches for yours,
life seeking life
and morning is far away
over beyond the curtain.

All translations by **Jaakko Mäntyjärvi / George Parris**

KINGS PLACE CHORAL HIGHLIGHTS

2021

Sat 26 Jun
Bach: Mass in B minor
The Feinstein
Ensemble & London
Bach Singers

Thu 1 Jul
Choral Pilgrimage
2021: The Call of
Rome
The Sixteen

Sun 11 Jul
Bach, the Universe &
Everything
Orchestra of the Age
of Enlightenment

Thu 21 Oct
Coronation Anthems
from Purcell to
Handel
Instruments and
Choir of Time & Truth

Wed 17 Nov
Court and Chapel
(Treasures of Tudor
England)
The Sixteen

Mon 13 Dec
Handel's Messiah
The Hanover Band &
Chorus

