

## PURCELL: Ode for St Cecilia 1692 – BMC 40

In 1683 a group of gentlemen amateurs and professional musicians started a "Musical Society" in London to celebrate the "Festival of St. Cecilia, a great Patroness of Music" on November 22nd. They asked Henry Purcell, then only 24, to be the first to write an Ode for their festivals; this Ode, *Welcome to All the Pleasures*, can be heard on our previous disc, BMC 39. Contrast this with the present *Ode for St Cecilia*, composed in 1692. Here we have a Purcell greatly matured and confident, already foreshadowing Handel.

### TRACK 1

#### Symphony (Overture)

*This splendid five-section Symphony opens with strings and trumpets answering each other. The second part is a Fugue on two subjects, followed by an Adagio in which the oboes echo the violins. A brilliant Allegro for the trumpets follows, and after a harmonic Adagio, the Allegro is reprised.*

### TRACK 2

#### Soli and Chorus: "Hail! Bright Cecilia"

Hail! bright Cecilia, fill ev'ry heart  
With love of thee and thy celestial art,  
That thine, and Music's sacred love  
May make the British forest prove  
As famous as Dodona's vocal grove.

*The text of this Ode is a poem by Nicholas Brady, Chaplain to Queen Mary. Following the Opening Chorus, each instrument is praised in turn. Here we have the recorders and violins, with references to "box and fir", the woods used in making these instruments.*

#### Duet: Hark, Each Tree

Hark, each tree its silence breaks,  
The box and fir to talk begin,  
This in the sprightly violin,  
That in the flute distinctly speaks. '  
'Twas sympathy their list'ning brethren drew, / When  
to the Thracian lyre with leafy wings they flew.

*The next Aria was sung at the first performance by Mr Purcell himself "with incredible graces"*

#### Alto Solo: 'Tis Nature's Voice

'Tis nature's voice, thro' all the wood and creatures understood,  
the universal tongue, to none of her num'rous race unknown.  
From her it learned the mighty art  
To court the ear, or strike the heart, or  
At once the passions to express and move,  
We hear, and straight we grieve or hate, rejoice or love. In unseen chains it does  
the fancy bind. At once it charms the sense and captivates the mind.

#### Chorus: Soul of the World

Soul of the world, inspired by thee,  
The jarring seeds of matter did agree.

Thou didst the scattered atoms bind  
Which by the laws of true proportion joined,  
Made up of various parts, one perfect harmony.

### TRACK 3

#### Soprano & Chorus: Thou Tun'st This World

Thou tun'st this world below, the spheres above, /  
Who in the heavenly round to their own music move.

#### Trio: With That Sublime Celestial Lay

With that sublime celestial lay  
can any earthly sounds compare?  
If any earthly music dare, the noble organ may.  
From heav'n its wondrous notes were giv'n,  
Cecilia oft conversed with heav'n.  
Some angel of the sacred quire.  
Did with this breath the pipes inspire,  
And of the notes above  
the just resemblance gave,  
Brisk without lightness, without dullness, grave.

*Both the previous, and the following numbers are in praise of the Organ, the following Bass Solo being an Air on a Ground Bass, a perennial favorite of Purcell!*

#### Bass Solo: Wond'rous Machine

Wondrous machine, to thee the warbling Lute, Tho'  
used to conquest, must be forced to yield,  
With thee unable to dispute.

#### Alto Solo: The Airy Violin

The airy violin and lofty viol quit the field.  
In vain they tune their speaking strings  
To court the true and fair or praise victorious kings.  
Whilst all thy consecrated lays  
Are to more noble uses bent.  
And every grateful note to heav'n repays  
The melody it lent.

#### Duet: In Vain the Am'rous Flute

In vain the am'rous flute and soft guitar jointly labour  
To inspire wanton heat and loose desire  
Whilst thy chaste airs do gently move  
Seraphic flames and heav'nly love.

### TRACK 4

*This next section opens with a tribute to the trumpets and kettle drums. Apart from the bass, the strings – already praised in their own right! – are silent throughout.*

#### Alto Solo: The Fife and all the Harmony

The fife and all the awful harmony of war in vain  
attempt the passions to alarm, Which thy  
commanding sounds compose and charm.

**Duet: Let These Among Themselves Contest**

Let these amongst themselves contest  
Which can discharge its single duty best.  
Thou summ'st their differing graces up in one,  
And art a consort of them all within thyself alone.

*In the preceding Duet, the instruments individually praised may "contest among themselves which is best". It is for St Cecilia to bring them all together in the grand final Chorus which follows.*

**Full Chorus: Hail! Bright Cecilia**

Hail, bright Cecilia, hail to thee!  
Great Patroness of us and Harmony!  
Who whilst among the quire above  
Thou dost thy former skill improve.  
With rapture of delight dost see  
Thy fav'rite art make up a part  
Of infinite felicity.

*A Grand Finale indeed to what must surely be one of Purcell's finest and noblest works.*

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*We complete our disc with a short program of Songs given by **Alfred Deller, Counter-Tenor**, alternating with Harpsichord pieces performed by **George Malcolm**, on a Goff Harpsichord. The Harpsichord pieces, except for the Hornpipe, are taken from "**Musick's Handmaid**", Part II.*

**5: "I Attempt from Love's Sickness to Fly"** from *The Indian Queen* (1695)  
(Text by John Dryden and Robert Howard)

I attempt from Love's sickness to fly  
in vain,  
Since I am myself my own fever and pain.  
No more now, fond heart, with pride no more swell,  
Thou canst not raise forces enough to rebel.  
For Love has more power and less mercy than Fate,  
To make us seek ruin and love those that hate.

**7: "What Shall I Do to Show How Much I Love Her"** from *Dioclesian* (1690)

What shall I do to show how much I love her?  
How many millions of sighs can suffice?  
That which wins other's hearts never can move her,  
Those common methods of love she'll despise. I will  
love more than man ever loved before me,  
Gaze on her all the day and melt all the night;  
Till for her own sake, at last she'll implore me;  
To love her less, to preserve our delight.  
Since Gods themselves could not ever be loving,  
Men must have breathing recruits for new joys;  
I wish my love could be always improving,  
Though eager love more than sorrow destroys.  
In fair Aurelia's arms leave me expiring,  
To be embalmed by the sweets of her breath;  
To the last moment I'll still be desiring;  
Never had hero so glorious a death.

**9: "Sweeter than Roses"** from *Pausanias* (1695)

Sweeter than roses, or cool evening breeze  
On a warm flow'ry shore, was the dear kiss;  
First trembling made me freeze,  
Then shot like fire all o'er.  
What magic has victorious love,  
For all I touch or see,  
Since that dear kiss, I hourly prove  
All is love to me.

**11: "Fairest Isle"**

Venus's Song, from *King Arthur* (1691)  
(Text by John Dryden)

Fairest Isle, all isles excelling,  
Seat of pleasure and of love;  
Venus here will choose her dwelling,  
And forsake her Cyprian grove.  
Cupid from his fav'rite nation  
Care and envy will remove;  
Jealousy that poisons passion,  
And despair that dies for love.  
Gentle murmurs, sweet complaining,  
Sighs that blow the fire of love;  
Soft repulses, kind disdain,  
Shall be all the pains you prove.  
Ev'ry swain shall pay his duty,  
Grateful every nymph shall prove;  
And as these excel in beauty,  
Those shall be renown'd for love.