



# Distant Lands



A SEQUENCE OF WORDS & MUSIC EXPLORING HOME AND AWAY

**Saturday 12 November, 2022, St. Peter's Church, Bournemouth**

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University Music Chamber Choir & Musicians

Conductor: Ian Davis

Accompanist: David Beeby



Through continued technological progress and innovation, the world, in many ways, has never seemed smaller. For global tourists, the relative ease and comfort of travel has made once impossible journeys commonplace experience. Through ever-present modes of media and communication, we have come to be familiar with unknown places and peoples. Yet for all this progress, our world remains mapped by the physical, political and cultural boundaries integral to the history of humankind, and journeys initiated by desperate circumstances remain as everyday as those inspired by the spirit of discovery.

This sequence contemplates the concept of physical and philosophical 'distant lands' through experiences of adventure, discovery, exploration, migration and displacement. Moving between past and present, we will explore the tensions between home and away, conquest and liberty, unity and otherness in this journey of words and music to the distant lands of our own knowledge and imagination.



To preserve the continuity of the sequence, we ask that you kindly reserve any applause until the end of the programme.



*'Not all those who wander are lost'*

J.R.R. Tolkien

**CHOIR:**

**Come Fly with Me**

**Van Heusen (1913-1990) & Cahn (1913-1993) arr. Mac Huff**

This song was composed for Frank Sinatra in 1958, becoming the title track of his album of the same name. Marking the beginnings of the jet age, the song makes references to exotic destinations made accessible by commercial flight and highlights the spirit of fun and adventure associated with travel and holidays. We perform the song in this upbeat choral version by renowned arranger, Mac Huff.

**READING:**

Extract from **Dreams, Waking Thoughts & Incidents: In a Series of Letters from Various parts of Europe** by William Beckford (1760-1844)

**SONG:**

**Gondelfahrer**

**Franz Schubert (1797-1828)**

Schubert never saw the sea, nor did he visit Venice. Yet in this 1824 setting of a text by Johann Mayrhofer, the composer evocatively captures the gentle rocking motion of the gondola in the moonlight.

*'Moon and stars dance / the fleeting round of the spirits: / who would be forever fettered / by earthly cares!'  
'Now, my boat, you can drift / in the moonlight; / free from all restraints / you are rocked on the bosom of the sea'  
'From the tower of St Mark's / midnight's decree tolled forth: / all sleep peacefully. / Only the boatman wakes.'*

Translation © Richard Wigmore, author of *Schubert: The Complete Song Texts*, published by Schirmer Books, provided via Oxford Lieder  
[www.oxfordlieder.co.uk](http://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk)

**READING:**

Three extracts from **Don't Tell Mum** by Simon Hoggart & Emily Monk

(Hair-raising messages home from gap year travellers)

**SOLO:**

**Mother, I will have a husband**

**Gordon Jacob (1895-1984)**

Jacobs was a prolific English composer. After serving during WWI, he studied journalism before finally turning to music. He attended the Royal College of Music from 1920, where he studied composition with Stanford, Vaughan Williams and Howells. This playful setting sets an anonymous, early text.

## READING:

Extract from **History of A Six Weeks' Tour** by Mary Shelley (1797-1851)

## CHOIR:

**The Blue Bird**

**Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924)**

This partsong, composed in 1910, reflects on Shelley's description of birds over Lake Lucerne on her journey across Europe in 1814. Stanford sets a text by Mary Elizabeth Coleridge, using a soaring soprano solo to depict the blue bird in flight and the sustained chordal texture of the accompanying voices to evoke the stillness and beauty of the scene below.



*'There are no foreign lands. It is the traveller only who is foreign'*

Robert Louis Stevenson

This portion of the sequence presents two challenging historical texts: the opening Roger Quilter song (composed in the early twentieth century at the height of the British Empire's powers) and the primary source account of a white man's visit to Alaska in the nineteenth century. These historical texts are presented in counterpoint with postcolonial musical and literary responses: Gabriel Okara's poem, that directly answers the 'dance' described in the Alaska reading, and Leslie Adams's plaintive song that speaks compellingly to the concept of marginalisation and inequality as an inheritance of colonial endeavour. Debussy's *Syrinx* provides an evocative musical interlude within this powerful dialogue, offering an opportunity for reflection and contemplation.

## SONG:

**Foreign Children** from *Four Child Songs*

**Roger Quilter (1877-1953)**

The *Four Child Songs* have a complex publication history, but first came together as a set in 1914. The first two songs (dating from 1904) were dedicated to Quilter's sister, Norah, who had two young children at the time. The poems, all by Robert Louis Stevenson, are essentially didactic in character when considered in their contemporary context. To listeners today, however, the archaic language is challenging to say the least and the musical gestures seem stereotypical and generic. But the difficulties that the song presents serve to highlight the important issue of positionality that now frames our thinking about race, culture and identity.

## READING:

Extract from a contemporary account of a **Visit to Alaska in 1892**

This extract presents a nineteenth-century perspective that is also difficult to hear today, highlighting how ethnocentrism and the subjugation of values of cultural diversity at this time set an inequitable social course.

## SOLO:

### Syrinx

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Composed in 1913, Debussy's ground-breaking work for solo flute influenced the course of twentieth-century flute writing. Like many of Debussy's works, *Syrinx* has an extra-musical context being inspired by the mythological story of the nymph *Syrinx* who, pursued by *Pan*, turns herself into a thicket of reeds by the water's edge to escape. When *Pan* cuts the reeds to make his pipes, *Syrinx* is no more. Metaphorically, the story resonates powerfully with the themes of imperialism, conquest and otherness explored in this portion of the sequence. The music – improvisatory and free in style – draws on scales and melodic patterns from outside Western art music, adding to its qualities of mystery, distance and other-worldliness.

## READING:

### *You Laughed and laughed and Laughed* by Gabriel Okara (1921-2019)

Born in Bumodi, Nigeria, Gabriel Okara has been described as the first Modernist poet of Anglophone Africa. His work balances contrasting symbols, explores the need to reconcile extremes of experience and draws on African folklore, religion and imagery. This poem works in immediate counterpoint with the account of the *Visit to Alaska*, directly addressing the contempt for indigenous cultural practices – most particularly 'dance'. Whilst the poem's tone is direct, it transcends notions of retribution with the speaker's wisdom directing those who 'laugh' towards a higher level of knowledge and understanding.

## SONG:

### *For you there is no song*

Leslie Adams (b.1932)

Leslie Adams is an African-American composer, whose substantial output covers a wide range of genres including song, solo instrumental pieces, chamber music, symphonies and a concerto for piano. His musical style is largely framed within the Western classical tradition, but also includes unique elements of African-American music. This piece is taken from his *Five Millay Songs*, composed between 1955-1961, setting texts by his favourite poet, Edna St-Vincent Millay. Although not the original context for the poem, the text speaks powerfully to the ideas of power relations and marginalisation that characterises the historical legacy of colonialism.

For you there is no song,  
Only the shaking of the voice that meant to sing,  
The sound of the strong voice breaking.  
Strange in my hand appears the pen,  
And yours broken  
There are ink and tears on the page.  
Only the tears have spoken.



*'Man cannot discover new oceans unless he has the courage to lose sight of the shore'*  
André Gide

**READING:**

**The Scottish Emigrant's Farewell** by Alexander Hume (1558-1609)

**SOLO:**

**Farewell to Stromness**

**Peter Maxwell Davies (1934-2016)**

Peter Maxwell Davies's evocative piano solo was composed in 1980 as part of his *The Yellow Cake Revue*, a multi-movement work incorporating songs, recitations and piano interludes. The solo is composed over a ground bass – a repeating musical pattern in the bass line – with the melody influenced by the Scottish folk music tradition. The hypnotic piece speaks strongly and nostalgically to ideas of home and place.

**READING:**

**Letter from Thomas Reilly** (Albany, New York) to John M. Kelly (Dublin), April 24th, 1848.

**SONG:**

**Simple Gifts**

**Aaron Copland (1900-1990)**

This song originated amongst the Shaker community in Maine – a group itself associated with emigration – but was largely unknown outside of that circle until Aaron Copland used the melody in his *Appalachian Spring*. The text gives thanks for a simple and free life 'where we ought to be'.

**READING:**

**The Irish Emigrant** by John Douglas Sutherland Campbell (1845-1914)

**CHOIR:**

**O Danny Boy**

**Trad arr. Bob Chilcott (b.1955)**

Frederick E. Weatherly set his words to the beautiful Irish melody, *Londonderry Air*, in 1913. The text is at once melancholy and hopeful, describing the separation of those who have left their homeland and those who lovingly await their return. This contemporary arrangement by Bob Chilcott beautifully captures the emotional resonance of the text.



*'Distance is the journey. Displacement is the result.'*

Jaelyn Moriarty

**READING:**

**Roads** by Edward Thomas (1878-1917)

**SONG:**

**Severn Meadows**

**Ivor Gurney (1890-1937)**

Just as Edward Thomas experienced displacement through war, so too Ivor Gurney served at the Western Front between 1915-1917. Although he returned from war, Gurney's experiences had a profound influence on his mental health, and so in many ways his displacement from society was lasting. This setting of his own words was composed in the trenches and the extended, ponderous vocal phrases capture the composer's sense of wistful longing for his beloved Gloucestershire home.

**READING:**

**Empathy** by Alicia Stallings (b.1968)

Alicia Stallings is an American poet and fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She wrote this poem in 2015, when the Syrian civil war was becoming increasingly visible to other parts of the world. Of the genesis of this poem, she said: 'I did not want to write from the point of view of people undergoing this—that felt false to me; in a way I felt it was unimaginable and I wanted to keep that sense—and I wanted to engage with the very difficulty of writing about it.'

**CHOIR:**

**Still**

**Ole Gjeilo (b.1978) arr. Geoff Lawson**

As we contemplate the indomitable sense of movement that characterises the plight of refugees and reflect on A.E. Stallings's powerful juxtaposition of home and away, this soothing, wordless, choral arrangement of Ole Gjeilo's piano composition affords us a fortunate moment of stillness – a luxury not shared by all.

## READING:

### Lament for Syria by Amineh Abou Kerech

Written by fourteen-year-old Syrian refugee, Amineh Abou Kerech, this poem won the 2017 Betjeman poetry prize.

## SONG:

### Over the Rainbow

Harold Arlen (1905-1986)

Across time and culture, rainbows are a universal symbol of hope. Composed for the 1939 film, *The Wizard of Oz*, 'Over the Rainbow' contemplates a distant, promised land, where 'skies are blue' and the 'dreams that you dare to dream / Really do come true'.



### *'The only journey is the one within'*

Rainer Maria Rilke

## READING:

### Penelope by Carol Ann Duffy (b.1955)

This poem is taken from Duffy's fifth collection of poetry, *The World's Wife*. Whilst Odysseus makes his journey, Penelope awaits his return. This poem imagines her inner journey of personal development during his absence.

## SONG:

### Solveig's Song

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

Just as Penelope waits for Odysseus, so too Solveig faithfully and steadfastly holds Peer in her heart as he too makes a journey. Despite the difficulty of separation, Solveig is confident of their reunion – even if only in heaven. The haunting vocal melody perfectly captures the plaintive mood, whilst the ponderous march motif of the accompaniment highlights the idea of movement and journeying.

## READING:

### Our journey had advanced by Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

**CHOIR:**

**Irish Blessing**

**Philip Stopford (b.1977)**

As a chorister at Westminster Abbey and organ scholar at Keble College, Oxford and Truro and Canterbury cathedrals, it is no surprise that the contemporary British composer, Philip Stopford, specialises in choral music. This warm, expressive and lyrical setting of the Irish Blessing is typical of his unapologetically melodic musical style. The words of the Irish Blessing offer a prayer for the ultimate journey to a distant land of hope, peace and eternal comfort.

*May the road rise to meet you.  
May the wind be always at your back.  
May the sun shine warm upon your face;  
the rains fall soft upon your fields and until we meet again,  
may God hold you in the palm of His hand.*

