

The Cantilena Singers

Daniel Spreadbury – Director

Songs of Suffolk



Saturday 13 July 2024

St Mary's Church, Newmarket

Peter Warlock (1894–1930), arr. Armstrong Gibbs (1889–1960)
Yarmouth Fair

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)
Five English folk songs

The dark-eyed sailor / The spring time of the year / Just as the tide was flowing /
The lover's ghost / Wassail song



English folk song, arr. Percy Grainger (1882–1961)
Brigg Fair

Roderick Elmer (text: Alfred, Lord Tennyson)
Song of the brook (from *Four River Songs*)

English folk song, arr. Gustav Holst (1874–1934)
I love my love

Norfolk folk song, arr. Ernest Moeran (1894–1950)
The sailor and young Nancy

David Willcocks (1919–2015) (text: Robert Burns)
Afton Water



Daniel Spreadbury, after Ernest Moeran
Six Suffolk folksongs

Nutting time / Blackberry Fold / Cupid's garden / Father and daughter /
The isle of Cloy / A seaman's life



Scottish folk song, arr. John Ross
The wild mountain thyme

Irish folk song, arr. Ben Finn
She moved through the fair

About tonight's programme

Looking back on the typically well-to-do folk song collectors of the late 19th and early 20th century with the benefit of today's greater sensitivities around cultural appropriation and authenticity, it's easy to dismiss their efforts in preserving the music of ordinary people in their everyday lives as rather heavy-handed and perhaps even condescending. Certainly, the so-called first British folk revival grew out of a fashionable trend towards pastoral romanticism, linked to uneasiness about the profound impacts of the ongoing industrial revolution and the irreversible changes to the life of the country, not only in the countryside but also in our burgeoning cities. It tapped into an ongoing antiquarian interest – gathering of folklore, customs, and tales – and is likewise linked to the rise of nationalism and exceptionalism that blighted the politics of the time.

This was a search for a distinctive English sound, an effort to differentiate English music from the European influences that had stifled this individuality, so the thinking at the time went, since the time of Henry Purcell two centuries earlier. Several of the composers whose arrangements we sing tonight, including Percy Grainger and especially Ralph Vaughan Williams, seized upon these songs and suffused them throughout their works. The focus on the folk songs of rural communities largely ignored the everyday music of the urban environment – such as working songs, or popular music hall songs – and indeed the collectors often bowdlerised the texts, suppressing words or ideas that were distasteful in polite society.

These issues have been front of mind for me, as I sought to adapt a cycle of six folk songs collected in Suffolk by Ernest Moeran and set for solo voice and piano in the early 1930s as the centrepiece of tonight's programme. I did not collect (and indeed could not have collected) the songs myself and know nothing more of the original singers than their names and where he found them as recorded by Moeran in his original manuscript. I have tried consciously to maintain the character of Moeran's arrangements, except where it was impractical given the highly pianistic textures in two of the six songs. How do these new arrangements fit into the problematic history of the revival of folk songs? I am not the person to make that judgement: but I hope that you will enjoy hearing them as we perform them for the first time here tonight.

We can find much to criticise from today's vantage point. But if we can bring ourselves to look beyond these issues there is also much to celebrate, because the music itself is wonderful.

Daniel Spreadbury, Director

The Cantilena Singers

Soprano

Hilary Burton
Elizabeth Longford
Alison McRobb
Cath Stubbs
Ana Sugarman-Banaszak
Caille Sugarman-Banaszak

Alto

Kate Clark
Evelyn Payne
Judy Rowland
Janet Stevens

Tenor

Steven Aronson
Sam Spreadbury
Robert Stevens

Bass

Chris Fell
Mike Gait
Tim Rowland

The Cantilena Singers is a well-established chamber choir that performs regularly in Cambridge and the surrounding villages. The choir was founded in 1983 and has been performing locally and promoting the joy of choral singing for more than 40 years.

We are always looking for new members. If you would like to join us, please get in touch.



Daniel Spreadbury read for a degree in music at University College, Oxford, where he studied singing with Alastair Thompson, founder member of the King's Singers, and sang with and directed a variety of college and chapel choirs around the city. Daniel has been the director of Cantilena since 2001.



Next concert

Our next concert will be in early December 2024 as we celebrate the season of Advent. Please keep an eye on our web site for more information.