

2026  
**YORK**  
EARLY  
MUSIC  
FESTIVAL

**Helen Charlston**  
**Paul Agnew**  
**Sergio Bucheli**

*A Gentle Air*

**Merchant Taylors' Hall**  
**Thursday 9 July 7.00pm**

**Helen Charlston** *mezzo soprano*

**Paul Agnew** *tenor*

**Sergio Bucheli** *lute*

*A Gentle Air*

Le Doux Silence de nos bois  
Je veux me plaindre

**Honoré D'Ambruys** 1650-1702  
**Sébastien Le Camus** c.1610-c.1677

Ombre de mon amant  
Vos mepris chaque jours

**Michel Lambert** c.1610-1669  
**Lambert**

Suite in D minor

**Robert de Visée** c.1655-1732/33

Triste deserts sombre retraites, H.469  
On n'aimes plus dans ces bocages

**Marc-Antoine Charpentier** 1643-1704  
**Le Camus**

Celle qui fait tout mon tourment, H.450  
Sans frayeur dans ce bois, H.467  
Charmantes fleures naissez, H.449b

**Charpentier**  
**Charpentier**  
**Charpentier**

Suite in G major

**de Visée**

Laissez durer la nuit

**Le Camus**

Ma berger est tendre et fidele  
Aupres du feu l'on fait l'amour, H.446  
Je vous revoir

**Lambert**  
**Charpentier**  
**Jean-Philippe Rameau** 1683-1764

In the first half of seventeenth century as the French court was reeling from political turbulence at home and abroad, its aristocratic salons witnessed an extraordinary artistic flourishing. Rooted in a deep love for the lute and for chamber music making, the refined *air de cour* became the period's iconic style. The term was first coined in 1571 in a publication of songs by Adrien Le Roy and remained popular well into Louis XIV's reign. In its earliest beginnings it referred to simple, often strophic songs for many voices that could be sung by anyone, taking over the 'voix de ville' or 'vaudeville' genre. Thanks to the imagination and skill of the composers whom we will meet today, it soon took on new life as an elegiac genre for solo voice and lute accompaniment.

Imagination was at the heart of this declamatory style. Composers sought to amplify luscious poetry with artful ornamentation, placing emphasis on rhetorical clarity and directness to make the poetry easy for the listener to understand and (most importantly) to feel. The *salons précieux* were attended by members of the aristocracy, public servants, judges, literati and artists, who came together to forget political and military tensions and to practise the art of civil conversation. Their creative haven is mirrored in the abundant nature of the amorous poetry so often set in these songs. The Pastoral idyll dominated much of the poetry written for these affluent urban readers: lush rural vistas, shepherds and shepherdesses frolicking in the grass, and young lovers naively revelling in the pleasures of love. Even tales of unrequited love are heralded as visions of beauty to be enjoyed, despite the pain that beauty inevitably inflicts.

'The author of the most beautiful airs (*L'auteur des plus beaux airs*)' **Michel Lambert** was one of the most important French composers, singing teachers, violinists and dancers of the age of Louis XIV. Having first arrived in court as a ballet dancer, he ended up serving the King as *Maitre de la Musique de la Chamber du Roi* (Master of Music of the King's Bedchamber) for 36 years. His daughter eventually married Jean-Baptiste Lully, who also later held this illustrious title, but unlike his son-in-law he never composed an opera. Instead, Lambert wrote hundreds of airs. The 300 or so surviving examples are no doubt just the tip of the iceberg, as most of the 20 publications he was known to have written have been lost. Many of his songs revel in a simplicity of texture and gentle intimacy. The chaconne, ***Vos mépris chaque jour*** is built playfully on a four-note descending bass line, a compositional device so often heard in this period to signify a lament, just as the text to this song might suggest. Here however, it is delivered in the major key with carefree ornamentation, as pleasure wins over pain.

Born the same year as Lambert, **Sébastien Le Camus** was a virtuoso gamba and theorbo player who joined the ranks of the court musicians at the beginning of the 1640s. He was appointed Viol Player to the young Louis XIV after the untimely death of Louis Couperin who had previously held the job. Unlike Lambert, Le Camus's songs were not published in his lifetime: his son published many posthumously, and others appeared in compiled volumes alongside other composers. *Je veux me plaindre* for example, was published by Christophe Ballard in *Airs sérieux et à boire de different auteurs*, 1703.

A generation younger, **Robert de Visee** was employed as one of Louis XIV's private musicians and went on to be guitar teacher to Louis XV. His instrumental writing represents the zenith of the French style of lute playing. Based around dance forms that were then to be taken to new heights by the likes of J.S Bach, this is intimate, soft-edged music.

**Marc-Antoine Charpentier** is perhaps the best known of our composers listed this evening. He studied in Rome for several years during the 1660s with Giacomo Carissimi (famed composer of the oratorio *Jephte*), from whom he absorbed the most popular mid-seventeenth-century Italian styles and forms. Upon his return to Paris, it was sacred and dramatic music that took his focus both as a singer and as a composer. Tonight, however, we hear some shorter songs that show his prowess in the lineage of composers of the *air de cour*. Like those in the generation before him, he continued to perfect the style with a startling ability to musically condense a mood with complete immediacy. From the obsessive refrain of the spurned lover in *Celle qui fait tout mon tourment* to the languid empty fragility of the opening suspension in *Triste deserts sombre retraites*, we are in no doubt as to the story being told from the first note.

As an anonymous poet reminded the members of the *salons précieux*, these songs were designed to enchant: 'Our minds free and contented thrive on these sweet diversions' (*Nos esprits libres et contents vivent en ces doux passe-temps*). Student of Michel Lambert, **Honoré D'Ambruys** (1650-1702) begins our concert this evening with a perfect response to this motto. The gentle melodic embellishment over a delightfully simple ground bass of *Le doux silence de nos bois* tells a tale of rose-tinted love. The sweet silence of the forest is punctuated by the chirping of the birds in the flexible melismatic writing in the voice. May his gentle refrain *Let us not lose a moment of these beautiful days: a time for pleasure and for love* guide us through this intimate world of grace and poetic mastery.

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### **Le doux silence de nos bois**

Le doux silence de nos bois  
N'est plus troublé que de la voix  
Des oiseaux que l'amour assemble.  
Bergère qui fais mes désirs  
Voici le mois charmant des fleurs et des zéphyr  
Et la saison qui te ressemble  
Ne perdons pas un moment des beaux jours  
C'est le temps des plaisirs et des tendres amours;

Songeons en voyant le printemps  
Qu'il en est un dans nos beaux ans  
Qu'on n'a qu'une fois en sa vie  
Mais c'est peu que d'y songer  
Il faut belle Philis le ménager.  
Cette saison nous y convie  
Ne perdons pas un moment des beaux jours  
C'est le temps des plaisirs et des tendres amours

### **Je veux me plaindre**

Je veux me plaindre  
de vos rigueurs,  
et qu'ay-je à craindre,  
pour me contraindre,  
piusque je meurs?

### **Ombre de mon amant**

Ombre de mon amant, ombre toujours plaintive,  
Hélas, que voulez-vous, je meurs.  
Soyez un moment attentive  
Au funeste récit de mes vives douleurs.  
C'est sur cette fatale rive

The soft silence of our woods  
is now broken only by the songs  
of the birds that Love gathers here.  
Shepherdess, my heart's desire,  
behold the fair month of flowers and zephyrs,  
and the season that resembles you.  
Let's lose not a moment of these fine days,  
'tis the time for tender loves and pleasures;  
  
Let's dream as we watch the spring  
that there is one such season in our youth,  
that we have but one such time in our lives.  
But dreaming of this is not enough,  
we must, fair Phyllis, make it so.  
The season does thus invite us.  
Let's lose not a moment of these fine days,  
'tis the time for tender loves and pleasures.

I would complain  
of your harshness,  
and what do I have to fear  
would constrain me,  
since I am dying?

Shadow of my beloved, ever mournful ghost,  
alas, what do you wish, I'm dying.  
Listen carefully for a moment  
to the tragic story of my intense grief.  
Here, on this fatal shore

Que j'ay veu vostre sang couler avec  
mes pleurs.  
Rien ne peut arrester mon ame fugitive,  
Je cède à mes cruels malheurs.  
Ombre de mon amant, ombre toujours  
plaintive,  
Hélas, que voulez-vous, je meurs.

### **Vos mespris chaque jour**

Vos mespris chaque jour me causent  
mille allarmes,  
Mais je chers mon sort, bien qu'il soit  
regoureux:  
Helas! Si dans mes maux je trouve tant  
de charmes,  
Je mourrois de plaisir si j'estois plus  
heureux.

### **Tristes déserts, sombre retraite**

Tristes déserts, sombre retraite  
Rochers, à qui, toujours, j'ai confié mon  
sort;  
Écoutez le récit de la douleur secrète,  
Qui me fait courir à la mort:  
J'aimais, j'étais aimé;  
Du bonheur de ma vie,  
Les rois, les dieux étaient jaloux.  
Hélas! Ce temps n'est plus,  
L'infidèle Sylvie,  
De mon rival fait son époux.  
Tristes déserts, sombre retraite  
Rochers, à qui, toujours, j'ai confié mon  
sort;  
Je vous ai dit l'excès de ma douleur  
secrète,  
Vous serez témoins de ma mort.

I've seen your blood flowing with my  
tears.  
Nothing can stop my fleeting soul,  
I surrender to my cruel woes.  
Shadow of my beloved, ever mournful  
ghost,  
alas, what do you wish, I'm dying.

Your disdain every day gives me a  
thousand causes for alarm,  
But I cherish my lot, harsh though it be:  
Alas, if in my ills I find such charms,  
I would die of pleasure if I were happier.

Mournful deserts, sombre solitude,  
rocks to whom I have always confided  
my fate;  
listen to the story of my secret pain  
which causes me to hasten to my death:  
I loved, I was loved;  
kings and gods were jealous of the  
happiness of my life.  
Alas! That time is no more,  
faithless Sylvia  
took my rival as her husband.  
Mournful deserts, sombre solitude,  
rocks to whom I have always confided  
my fate;  
I have told you of the excess of my  
secret sorrow,  
you will be witnesses to my death.

### **On n'aime plus dans ces bocages**

On n'aime plus dans ces bocages  
Tous les bergers sont trompeurs et  
volages,  
Fuyons l'Amour, bergère, il cause trop  
de maux : N'aimons que le chant des  
oiseaux,  
La fraîcheur des ombrages,  
Et le doux bruit de nos ruisseaux :  
Lorsque l'Amour veut nous surprendre,  
Il nous paraît sincère et tendre ;  
Et nous pensons qu'il doit être éternel,  
Il est doux et flatteur, lorsqu'il  
commence à naître, Mais sitôt qu'il s'est  
fait connaître,  
Hélas ! qu'il est cruel.

*Anonyme*

### **Celle qui fait tout mon tourment**

Celle qui fait tout mon tourment  
Je l'aime à la folie;  
Depuis longtemps je suis amant  
De l'aimable Sylvie,  
La voir et l'aimer seulement,  
C'est toute mon envie.  
Celle qui fait...

La voir et l'aimer seulement  
C'est toute mon envie;  
Je n'ai point passé de moment  
Sans l'avoir bien servie:  
Celle qui fait...

Je n'ai point passé de moment  
Sans l'avoir bien servie;  
Les maux que je souffre en l'aimant  
Me coûteront la vie:  
Celle qui fait...

Les maux que je souffre en l'aimant  
Me coûteront la vie;

Love is no more to be found in these  
woodlands,  
All the shepherds are deceitful and  
fickle,  
Let us flee from Love, shepherdess, for  
it causes too much sorrow: Let us love  
only the song of the birds,  
The coolness of the shade,  
And the gentle murmur of our streams:  
When Love seeks to surprise us,  
He seems sincere and tender;  
And we think he must be eternal,  
He is sweet and flattering when he  
comes to life,  
But as soon as he reveals himself,  
Alas! how cruel he is.

She, who is responsible for all of my  
suffering  
I love to the point of madness;  
For a long time I have been the lover  
Of charming Sylvie  
To see her and love her only  
Is all my desire.  
She, who is responsible... etc.

To see her and love her only  
Is all my desire.  
I have not spent a moment  
Without serving her faithfully:  
She, who is responsible... etc.

I have not spent a moment  
Without serving her faithfully:  
The pains I suffer in loving her  
Will cost me my life:  
She, who is responsible... etc.

The pains I suffer in loving her  
Will cost me my life:

Dès que je la vois, cependant  
Mon âme en est ravie:  
Celle qui fait...

### **Sans frayeur dans ce bois**

Sans frayeur dans ce bois seule je suis  
venue.

J'y vois Tircis sans être émue.  
Ah! N'ai-je rien à ménager?

Qu'un jeune coeur insensible est à  
plaindre!

Je ne cherche point le danger,  
mais du moins, je voudrais le craindre.

### **Charmantes fleurs naissez \***

Charmantes fleurs naissez  
Herbes tendres, croissez  
le long de ces rivages :  
Venez, petits oiseaux,  
Accordez vos doux ramages  
Au bruit de nos ruisseaux.

Climène sur ces bords  
vient chercher les trésors  
De la saison nouvelle.  
Messagers du matin,  
Si vous voyez cette belle,  
Chantez sur son chemin.

Et vous, aimables fleurs,  
Douce filles des pleurs  
Qu'a répandus l'aurore,  
Méritez que la main  
De la nymphe que j'adore  
Vous moissonne en chemin.

*Anonyme*

### **Laissez durer la nuit \***

Laissez durer la nuit, impatiente Aurore.  
Elle m'aide à cacher mes secrètes  
douleurs,

And meanwhile, every time I see her  
It ravishes my soul:  
She, who is responsible... etc.

Without fear into these woods alone I  
came,  
there I see Thyrsis, and was not stirred.  
Ah, can I bring nothing to bear?

For a young heart without feeling is to  
be lamented.

While I do not seek danger in the least,  
I would at least like to fear it.

Charming flowers, be born,  
tender grass, grow  
along these banks  
come, little birds,  
tune your sweet warbling  
to the sound of our streams.

Climene has come here  
to gather the treasures  
of the new season.  
Messengers of the morning  
If you see this lovely person,  
sing to her on her way.

And you, sweet flowers,  
gentle daughters of the tears  
that dawn has strewn,  
may you deserve that the hand  
of the nymph that I adore  
shall harvest you on her way.

Let the night never end, O hasty dawn!  
The dark will help me hide my secret  
pain,

Et je n'ai pas encore  
Assez versé de pleurs.  
Pour ma douleur, hélas ! est-il des nuits  
trop sombres ?  
Depuis que mon berger quitta ce beau  
séjour,  
Ah ! Je ne puis souffrir le vif éclat du  
jour,  
Laissez-moi donc pleurer à la faveur des  
ombres  
Autant que voudra mon amour.  
*Madame La Comtesse de la Suze*

### **Ma Bergère est tendre et fidèle**

Ma Bergère est tendre et fidèle,  
Mais hélas ! Son amour n'égale pas le mien:  
Elle aime son troupeau, sa houlette et  
son chien,  
Et je ne saurais aimer qu'elle.

### **Auprès du feu l'on fait l'amour**

Auprès du feu l'on fait l'amour,  
Aussi bien que sur la fougère;  
N'attendez pas belle Bergère  
Que le printemps soit de retour,  
Pour choisir un Berger sincère:  
Auprès du feu l'on fait l'amour,  
Aussi bien que sur la fougère.

### **Je vous revois \***

Je vous revois, tout cède à la douceur  
extrême  
De retrouver l'objet qu'on aime.  
J'ai vu troubler mes eaux des pleurs que  
j'ai versés  
Perdons le souvenir de nos tourments  
passés.  
*Antoine Gautier de Montdorge*

And I have not yet shed  
my share of bitter tears.  
For my grief, alas! Can there be a night  
too dark?  
Ever since my shepherd boy left this fair  
abode,  
Ah! how can I endure the sharp glare of  
daylight?  
Give me leave to weep concealed by  
sombre shadows  
For as long as his love intends it.

My shepherdess is tender and faithful,  
But alas! Her love does not equal mine:  
She loves her flock, her crook, and her  
dog,  
While I can love only her.

We can make love by the fire  
as well as we can amid the ferns;  
fair Shepherdess, do not wait  
for springtime to return  
before you choose a loyal Shepherd:  
We can make love by the fire  
as well as we can amid the ferns.

I see you once more, everything yields  
to the utter delight  
of meeting once again the object of  
one's love.  
I saw my waters troubled by the tears  
that I shed  
Let us lose the memory of past torments.

\* translations taken from various Erato album booklets recorded by Les Arts  
Florissants, with permission and many thanks

## **Helen Charlston**

Helen Charlston's ability to make each performance completely her own and her depth of connection with audiences has earned her international acclaim. The former BBC New Generation Artist was a member of Le Jardin des Voix academy with Les Arts Florissants (2021–22) and won the Loveday Song Prize at the 2021 Kathleen Ferrier Awards. In 2023 she won a *Gramophone* Award for Best Concept Album and the *BBC Music Magazine* Vocal Award for her debut solo album.

She has worked across the globe with orchestras including the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra (San Francisco), Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin, Czech Philharmonic, London Philharmonic Orchestra, OAE, Academy of Ancient Music and BBC Symphony Orchestra. An avid recitalist, she has given performances at Wigmore Hall, the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Leeds Lieder, the Oxford International Song Festival, the Brucknerhaus Linz and LIFE Victoria Barcelona.

She made her debut at the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona last season, singing Sesto in Handel *Giulio Cesare* and has performed the title role in Purcell *Dido & Aeneas* across the world with Les Arts Florissants, Gabrieli Consort and at Versailles Royal Opera and The Grange Festival. She covered the title role in Charpentier's *Médée* at the Opéra national de Paris.

Helen is an advocate for new music and has commissioned works from Owain Park, Héloïse Werner, Ben Rowarth, Richard Barnard and Anna Semple. This season she creates the role of Marianne in Michel van der Aa *Theory of Flames* at Dutch National Opera. She has recently performed in recital at Brucknerhaus Linz, the Oxford International Song Festival, with the Prague Philharmonia at Lobkowitz Palace, Concertgebouw Amsterdam and Wigmore Hall.

## **Paul Agnew**

Paul Agnew is an accomplished teacher, tenor and conductor who is Musical Co-Director of Les Arts Florissants. As a singer, he made his mark on all the main international stages as a specialist in the music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the high-tenor roles of the French Baroque. He has conducted Les Arts Florissants in productions from Rameau's *Platée* (Theater an der Wien, Paris's Opéra Comique and New York's Lincoln Center), to a new production of *L'Orfeo* as part of the celebration of Claudio Monteverdi's 450th anniversary. He is also a guest conductor for the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, the Staatskapelle, Dresden and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, among others. He is codirector of Le Jardin des Voix, Les Arts Florissants' academy for young singers. This interest in the

training of new generations of musicians has led him to conduct the Orchestre Français des Jeunes Baroque, the European Union Baroque Orchestra and the European Baroque Academy in Ambronay.

Recent projects with Les Arts Florissants include a concert cycle dedicated to Carlo Gesualdo and an award-winning CD (Gramophone Award, Diapason d'Or, CHOC de Classica), Bach's St John Passion, the concert series Bach, A Life in Music at the Philharmonie de Paris and the Festival d'Ambronay, Handel's *Messiah*, Gluck's *Orphée et Eurydice* and a new production of Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* staged by choreographer Mourad Merzouki, with the laureates of the Jardin des Voix, and a new production of *Platée* at the Semperoper Dresden, Göteborg Opera and Garsington Opera.

### **Sergio Bucheli**

Born in Mexico City, Sergio Bucheli started playing the classical guitar before moving to the UK to study at the Yehudi Menuhin School thanks to a bursary funded by the Rolling Stones. In September 2016, Sergio was awarded the ABRSM and Christopher Hogwood Scholarships to pursue his undergraduate studies at the Royal Academy of Music with Elizabeth Kenny where he studied the lute, theorbo and Baroque guitar.

A sought after continuo player, Sergio is the principal lutenist of La Nuova Musica, The English Concert and a 'New Ensemblist' with Arcangelo. He also plays with The Irish Baroque Orchestra, Ensemble Marsyas, Early Opera Company, English Baroque Soloists and Fretwork.

Sergio is a keen chamber musician and often collaborates with Lawrence Power and the Collegium orchestra for the West Wycombe Chamber Music Festival. He is also a frequent duo partner with soprano Ruby Hughes.

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