

2026
YORK
EARLY
MUSIC
FESTIVAL

Yorkshire Baroque Soloists

Amphion Anglicus

Chapter House, York Minster

Wednesday 8 July 7.30pm

Yorkshire Baroque Soloists
Bethany Seymour *soprano*
Matthew Brook *bass-baritone*
Lucy Russell, Iona Davies *violins*
Rachel Gray *cello*
Peter Seymour *harpsichord, organ*

Amphion Anglicus

Music for a while. A single Song in Edipus **Henry Purcell** 1659-95
(*Orpheus Britannicus II*, 1702)

Lysander, I pursue in vain **John Blow** 1649-1708
(*Amphion Anglicus*, 1700)

Arms he delights in **Blow**
(*Amphion Anglicus*, 1700)

Arise, ye subterranean winds, Z.631 **Purcell**
(*The Tempest*, 1695)

Twelve Sonatas of Three Parts: **Purcell**
Sonata no. 1 in G minor, Z.790 (1683)
[...] / *Vivace* / *Adagio* – *Presto* / *Largo*

Let the dreadful engines of eternal will **Purcell**
(*The Comical History of Don Quixote*, 1694)

Sweeter than Roses, Z.585 **Purcell**
(*Pausanias*, 1695)

The Plaint, Z.629 **Purcell**
(*The Fairy Queen*, 1692)

Hence with your trifling Deity, Z.631 **Purcell**
(*Timon of Athens*, 1694)

Dialogue: You say, 'tis love creates the pain, Z.628 **Purcell**
(*King Arthur*)

A New Ground, Z.682 **Purcell**

I burn, my brain consumes to ashes
(*The Comical History of Don Quixote*, 1704)

John Eccles 1668-1735

This poet sings, Z.423
(*Anacreon's Defeat*)

Purcell

At looser hours (Horace to his lute)
(*Amphion Anglicus*, 1700)

Blow

You twice ten hundred deities
(*The Indian Queen; Orpheus Britannicus I*) 1698

Purcell

See Nature, rejoicing, has shown us the way, Z.323
(*Come ye Sons of Art*, 1694)

Purcell

Strong emotions such as madness were a recurrent preoccupation with seventeenth-century dramatists and the extreme, colourful texts inspired Purcell, Blow and their contemporaries to create some of their most intense and dramatic settings, exploring the ever-widening boundaries of expression and emotion. The idea of freedom from the torment of love and of lost love is a recurring theme. A few decades later, Handel wrote some of his most expressive and dramatic music during his time in Italy from 1706. His great collection of Italian cantatas often deal with topics of freedom from betrayal and injustice alongside the loss of the heart's liberty and life. Handel continued to write cantatas and duets in the Italian style well into his career in England and used some of the material for choruses in *Messiah*.

Restoration England enjoyed not only a strange mix of social styles but also a rich mix of artistic influences. One hundred years before the time of Purcell, England (and much of the rest of Europe) had been much influenced by Italian fashions; not only in its domestic consort music for voices and instruments, but also in its solo songs with their direct and vivid expression. Tudor England also had a strong polyphonic choral tradition and the enjoyment of passing dissonance brought about by the independence of the individual lines was still apparent in the work of the composers represented here. The restored monarchy in the person of Charles II had been much influenced by French manners during his period of exile in the years of the Commonwealth; many French musicians were attracted to England for employment and English composers were encouraged to study French styles. As a result we can hear also the sensuously expressive on-beat dissonance beloved of

the seventeenth-century French composers (led by Lully – an Italian, though in charge of music in France under Louis XIV – and Charpentier) which helps to further clarify and dramatise the text. Many of the songs follow the traditional form of recitative followed by a short aria or arioso which comments upon the drama presented in the recitative.

John Blow was organist at Westminster Abbey in 1668 and was a private musician to James II. In 1687 he moved to St Paul's Cathedral and his pupil, Henry Purcell, took over his teacher's duties at the Abbey; Blow then returned to the Abbey position after Purcell's death. In 1700 Blow was also appointed Composer to the Chapel Royal.

The majority of the songs in this programme are taken from two seventeenth-century publications with music mainly by Blow and Purcell. Henry Purcell's music was published in two volumes – *Orpheus Britannicus* – issued in 1698 and 1702 (ie after Purcell's death) by Playford. In the preface to the first volume, Henry Playford – the printer of the volume and the son of the music publisher John Playford – praises Purcell's setting of English texts. John Blow is represented by *Amphion Anglicus* of 1700 which is a compilation of solo songs, duets and dialogues, some taken from larger compositions or individual theatre and sacred songs.

One of the most popular and expressive song forms was the so-called mad songs. In the later seventeenth century, English mad songs emerged as a significant musical genre, blending poetry, drama and music to produce a deeply emotional experience. These songs were typically written in a highly expressive style, with lyrics that often depicted themes of love, loss, jealousy and madness. Musically, they were characterized by their use of complex harmonies and intricate melodic lines that were designed to convey the dramatic intensity of the text. The form is here represented by Purcell's *Let the dreadful engines of eternal will* of 1694. The piece is for a bass or baritone and depicts the character Cardenio's descent into jealous madness, driven by unrequited love for his beloved Lucinda. The text contrasts roaring, raging forces of nature and hellfire with the equally destructive, burning pain of heartbreak. In the same manner, *I Burn, my Brain Consumes to Ashes* is a famous seventeenth-century English mad song composed by John Eccles with text by playwright Thomas D'Urfey. Originally written for the play *Don Quixote* (circa 1694), the piece is a highly dramatic expression of obsessive, unrequited love and despair. Each of these mad songs illustrates the desire to

express extremes of emotion in a new and dramatic manner which communicated as clearly as possible with the performers and listeners. Some of the clichés of such songs are burning and freezing; flying and drowning; confused identity; delusions of grandeur; and haunting by mythical characters.

Julian Haylock writes that 'In the preface to his first set of 12 Sonatas – published in 1683 when he was only 24 – Purcell modestly declared that he had "faithfully endeavour'd a just imitation of the most fam'd Italian Masters", acknowledging the impact of a new kind of flair-driven virtuosity from the peninsula. Yet in truth his music remains grounded (no matter how exotically flavoured) in the fantasia style that was his natural inheritance. It is enhanced by a tantalisingly exquisite harmonic idiom that fuses the modal and scalic in a series of heart-tugging suspensions, offset by passages of heady contrapuntal ingenuity.' They are the instrumental equivalent of the mad songs.

Peter Seymour

Richard Phillips

(1940-2026)

York Early Music Festival is dedicating this concert to the memory of **Richard Phillips** who died in January 2026. Many of us looking to start our musical careers in the 1970s owe a great deal to Richard. Several of the important and life-changing projects in our lives were instigated by Richard (and his wife Veronica). As Music Officer of Yorkshire Arts Association he helped Yvonne and me to set up Yorkshire Baroque Soloists (in 1973 – before any of the other similar UK ensembles); he gave us many concert opportunities as a duo in Concerts in Yorkshire Churches and we learnt so much about 'the business'.

Importantly, he set up **York Early Music Festival** in 1977 and involved John Bryan, Tony Rooley and me; he helped set up Yorkshire Bach Choir in 1979. He encouraged the Landini Consort, the Fitzwilliam String Quartet, the Lindsay String Quartet and other Yorkshire-based groups; he helped develop The Consort of Musicke – whose early members included director Tony Rooley and singers Emma Kirkby, Evelyn Tubb and Paul Agnew and some instrumentalists including Catherine Mackintosh (whom we honoured with a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2020/22). He encouraged our collaboration with Klaus Neumann and WDR-Köln and developed our administration team – initially John and Margaret Bryan, alongside Veronica.

So many of us, including performers and patrons of the Festival owe so much to Richard's vision, energy, expertise, enthusiasm and encouragement. Thank you, Richard, from us all.

Peter Seymour

Yorkshire Baroque Soloists

Yorkshire Baroque Soloists was formed in 1973 by Peter Seymour to perform a repertoire from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for vocal and instrumental forces ranging from chamber to orchestral size. The group has performed and recorded in most European countries and has regularly appeared in Baroque and Classical repertoire in York Early Music Festival.

Much of the orchestra's work has been with Yorkshire Bach Choir and recent performances have included Bach's *St John Passion* and Haydn's *The Creation* and a programme of music by Haydn and Mozart written for the Salzburg court. Commercially released recordings have included Bach's *Motets* (Carlton); *A Festal Mass at the Imperial Court in Vienna, 1648* (Carlton); Mozart's *Requiem*; *Psalms and motets by Tomás Luis de Victoria*; Monteverdi *Vespro Della Beata Vergine*; Bach Family Motets. In 2011 YBS recordings Bach *St John Passion* and *B minor Mass* were released by Signum Records. In September 2013, YBS recorded Bach's early version of *St Matthew Passion* in a new edition by Peter Seymour also for Signum Records. This uses solo voices throughout; singers include Charles Daniels (Evangelist), Peter Harvey (Christus), Bethany Seymour, Helen Neeves, Sally Bruce-Payne, Nancy Cole, Joseph Cornwell, Julian Podger and Matthew Brook.

YBS has performed Purcell's *Fairy Queen* and *Dido & Aeneas* in Festival Mitte Europa (in Germany and Czech Republic) and presented a Purcell Day of three concerts in Merseburg (Germany) and at Köthener Herbst performed a programme of music by Bach, Torelli and Handel from Bach's library from his time at Köthen. In recent summers YBS has appeared at Ryedale Festival and at Knechtsteden Festival Alte Musik.

Next season's programme with Yorkshire Bach Choir includes *B minor Mass* (5 December 2026), Bach *Magnificat* and oratorios for Easter and Ascension (20 March 2027). The season opens with a programme of sacred and secular music by Monteverdi and his contemporaries (31 October 2026).

YORK EARLY MUSIC FESTIVAL

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