

Come Ye Sons of Art (Birthday Ode for Queen Mary, 1694)
Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

By the 1690s, **Henry Purcell** was the brightest star on London's musical scene. Appointed organist of Westminster Abbey at the age of 20, he also held the appointments of Gentleman of the Chapel Royal and Keeper of the King's Instruments. The height of professional success was to have one's music performed at the royal court, and Purcell was a frequent contributor. Court musical celebrations could be occasioned by many different events, but royal birthdays were a particular favorite. There was a tradition of performing Odes specially composed for the monarch's birthday. *Come, Ye Sons of Art* is the last of many royal Odes that he composed and was for Queen Mary's birthday on 30th April 1694, with text by the poet Nahum Tate. Purcell's next composition for a monarch was her funeral music in March the following year, 5 months before his own death.



The soloists and chorus celebrate the Queen's virtues. The opening symphony is in three parts, beginning with a stately largo, continuing with a fugal allegro, and rounded off by an adagio that suggests the gravity of the occasion through use of the minor mode and dissonance. The opening solo for alto, "Come, Ye Sons of Art," is echoed by the chorus as a cheerful call to celebration. In "Sound the Trumpet" the singers embody the trumpets and oboes described in the text. In addition to the evocative vocal writing, the piece is noteworthy for its employment of the ground bass, a favorite device of English composers, in which the bass line consists of a brief melody repeated several times. Following a reprise of the opening chorus there is a solo for alto, "Strike the Viol." The Day that such a Blessing Gave" is a minuet that begins with solo bass, whose melody is then harmonized by the full chorus. "Bid the Virtues" is a poignant solo for soprano that melds with an obbligato, in which chains of suspensions-- a typical Baroque device-- create waves of dissonance and heighten the harmonic tension. "These are the Sacred Charms" is another ground bass aria, this one for solo bass voice. In the final section, "See Nature Rejoicing," is a duet between soprano and bass and reprised by the chorus. All forces join at last to bring the piece to a festive close.

Lo, The Full Final Sacrifice-Gerald Finzi (1901-1956)

The Finzi Trust summarizes **Gerald Finzi** as: "20th century English composer, renowned for inspired, flexible Thomas Hardy verse settings and lyrical instrumental style. Lover of reading, collector of books, conservationist - whether of 18th century music or apples: scholar, aesthete, stalwart citizen - directing amateur music-making, hosting war evacuees. Cherished husband of Joy, artist and poet."



It is easy to forget the extra-musical interests of composers; but Finzi was indefatigable in his pursuits, championing obscure composers, collecting over 3,000 rare books, and saving several traditional English apples from extinction. With the friendship and encouragement of Vaughan Williams he wrote over forty works, mostly

for voice or chorus and orchestra. Although Purcell was the master of setting inane text to great music, Gerald Finzi was the master of setting great text to great music. The relationship between word and music is remarkable and highly crafted. Finzi often set to music the texts of some of England's most outstanding poets, including Thomas Hardy and William Wordsworth. The Mastersingers have previously presented *Intimations of Immortality*, *For St. Cecilia*, *Farewell to Arms*, and the American premier of *Requiem da Camera*.

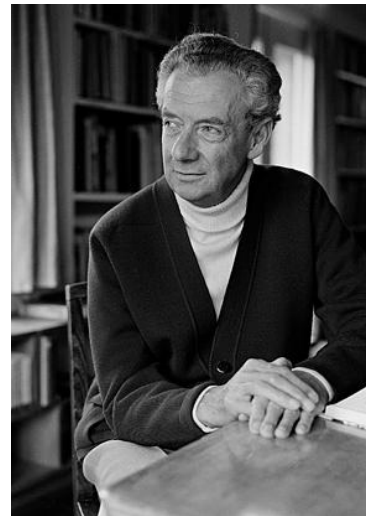
Lo, The Full Final Sacrifice was written in 1946 as a rather hurried commission. Finzi liked to spend time reworking and refining his music, but this composition was finished in a matter of months. This is a powerful and somber anthem, commenting on death as sacrifice. The composer's own life was full of loss, as his father died when Gerald was eight and his three older brothers perished during World War I. Gerald Finzi died in 1956, only ten years after writing this anthem. He was struck down by Chicken Pox, following his treatment for Hodgkin's Disease.

The text is drawn from adaptations by Richard Crashaw of two Latin hymns by Thomas Aquinas, "Adoro Te" and "Lauda Sion Salvatorem." It is essentially a reflection on the Eucharist and the sacrifice of Christ, along with some Old Testament references and obscure allusions. The piece is a solemn statement of the redemptive power of sacrifice, despite the misery of bereavement and its accompanying threat of the demise of love. The first hymn introduces the theme of sacrifice so that "all may drink the same wine" and celebrates "Rich Royal food! ...Whose use denies us to the dead!"

The second hymn, "Rise, Royal Sion! Rise and sing!" is a joyous song of faith leading to the Eucharistic themes of food, love, and death--"When Life, himself at point to die of love, was his own Legacy." The third and final hymn evokes the languishing cry, "O soft self-wounding Pelican! Whose breast weeps Balm for wounded man" as sacrifice given for love is once again brought to the fore.

Rejoice in the Lamb –Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Rejoice in the Lamb is one of **Benjamin Britten's** most popular and delightful choral compositions. It abounds in light-hearted detail, unusual rhythms, short but beautiful lyrical excerpts, and some of the most original choral music ever written. The music is exquisite in its portrayal of the text. The fourth and fifth sections dealing with the cat and mouse are moments of sheer musical delight. The text is extracted from Jubilate Agno by Christopher Smart, an 18th century poet who was deeply religious, at times brilliant, but mentally unstable. Jubilate Agno was written while Smart was in an asylum and as a whole alternates between chaos and sheer genius. Britten has selected some of the finest passages to create a cantata in which all creatures worship God in their own being.



The cantata has ten short sections. At the opening, the choir solemnly intones the words "Rejoice in God...." Then names from the Old Testament are linked with various animals in praise of God. The third section is a quiet, moving Hallelujah. Smart's cat Jeoffry is used in the fourth section as an example of nature praising God by simply being what the Creator intended, himself. The fifth section commends the mouse, and the sixth speaks

of flowers as "the poetry of Christ." The seventh section tells of Smart's sufferings; but even these are cause for praising God, for it is through Christ that he will find his deliverance. The eighth section gives four letters from the alphabet, leading to a full chorus in section nine, which speaks of musical instruments and music's praise of God. The final section repeats the Hallelujah.