

HUGH BENHAM

*Songs for Times
and Seasons*

CONVIVUM
RECORDS



Soprano Amy Carson
Piano Nicola Rose

Tracklist

Songs for *Times and Seasons*

TIMES AND SEASONS: FOUR SONGS

1	i	Lovely Spring	1.46
2	ii	Love and Friendship	1.49
3	iii	An Autumn Rain-Scene	3.29
4	iv	Dream-Song	3.58

THREE SONGS FROM WILLIAM BLAKE

5	i	The Shepherd	1.19
6	ii	Ah, Sun-flower!	2.38
7	iii	To Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love	3.06
Total running time			18.00

Programme Note

Times and Seasons: Four Songs (tracks 1 – 4) were composed in 2023–4. The original idea was to find a suitable poem for each of the four seasons, and *Lovely Spring* (or ‘Tempus Fugit’) by Christina Rossetti (1830–94) and *An Autumn Rain-Scene* by Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) were among several obvious choices. In place of Summer and Winter poems, I chose *Love and Friendship* by Emily Brontë (1818–48) with its references to ‘spring’, ‘winter’ and ‘December’, and *Dream-Song* by Walter de la Mare (1873–1956) with its various references to times of day, notably ‘Darkness at the shut of day’.

Lovely Spring (or ‘Tempus fugit’ – Rossetti’s own title) begins with successive E and D major triplet arpeggio patterns in the piano, blended by the sustaining pedal into E major 11th chords which suggest both the vibrant new life of spring and ‘time flying’. The voice has mainly short, separated phrases which match the brief exclamatory lines of the poem.

Emily Brontë tells us that ‘Love is like

the wild rose briar; / Friendship like the holly tree’. The two are contrasted (in the poem, and musically) until the conclusion is reached that, beautiful though the rose is in spring, it is the evergreen holly that will survive winter (its ‘garland green’), friendship lasting longer than love.

Hardy’s *Autumn Rain-Scene* has seven three-line stanzas, telling of individuals on various errands (predominantly challenging or sad) ‘on whom the rain comes down’. Falling phrases at various pitches, differently harmonised, are obvious musical responses, following on from the different character and melodic line of each errand – that is until the end, where greater stillness is appropriate for the one ‘who knows nought of [the rain’s] chilling fall’...

Walter de la Mare’s *Dream-Song* has three six-line stanzas, each of which begins with two short lines that name different forms of light (‘Sunlight, moonlight / Twilight, starlight’ in stanza 1). There are, accordingly, hints of strophic treatment, but after this the contrasting

Programme Note

characters of the stanzas demand individual treatment. There is, for example, a climax where the lions roar in stanza 2, and a quieter more sustained treatment as we contemplate 'wonders far away' in stanza 3. Prolonged use of the piano's sustaining pedal, while harmonies change, contributes to the dream-like feeling of the piano postlude. The final C sharp major chord is deliberately 'far away' from the preceding tonality.

Earlier in 2023 I chose three poems by William Blake (1757–1827) for a short set of songs (tracks 5 – 7) that would show something of the variety of subject matter in his lyric poetry. The songs were dedicated to Adrian Green of Convivium Records, who performed two of them at my 80th birthday concert in 2024.

The Shepherd is from *Songs of Innocence* (1789), and is suitably happy, pastoral, even naïve. The darker and somewhat mysterious text of *Ah, Sun-flower!*, from *Songs of Experience* (1794), provides plenty of imagery to which the composer can respond – notably 'pined away with desire',

'shrouded in snow'. and 'Arise from their graves and aspire'.

To Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love (entitled 'The Divine Image' in *Songs of Innocence*) concludes the set. The phrase used to set the opening line recurs when the same words begin the second stanza, but otherwise the setting avoids the strophic form that the hymn-like metre might suggest. In the final stanza Blake concludes that 'all must love the human form / In heathen, Turk and Jew' (for 'Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell / There God is dwelling too'). This is a very inclusive statement, although behind it must stand the kinds of discriminatory sentiment more widespread in the late 18th century.

Hugh Benham

Texts

TIMES AND SEASONS: FOUR SONGS

1 Tempus Fugit (Lovely Spring)

Christina Rossetti

Lovely Spring,
A brief sweet thing,
Is swift on the wing;
Gracious Summer,
A slow sweet comer,
Hastens past;
Autumn while sweet
Is all incomplete
With a moaning blast,—
Nothing can last,
Can be cleaved unto,
Can be dwelt upon;
It is hurried through,
It is come and gone,
Undone it cannot be done,
It is ever to do,
Ever old, ever new,
Ever waxing old
And lapsing to Winter cold.

2 Love and Friendship

Emily Brontë

Love is like the wild rose-briar;
Friendship like the holly-tree—
The holly is dark when
the rose-briar blooms
But which will bloom most constantly?

The wild rose-briar is sweet in spring,
Its summer blossoms scent the air;
Yet wait till winter comes again,
And who will call the wild-briar fair?

Then scorn the silly rose-wreath now,
And deck thee with the holly's sheen,
That when December blights thy brow,
He still may leave thy garland green.

3 An Autumn Rain-Scene

Thomas Hardy

There trudges one to a merry-making
With a sturdy swing,
On whom the rain comes down.

Texts

To fetch the saving medicament
Is another bent,
On whom the rain comes down.

One slowly drives his herd to the stall
Ere ill befall,
On whom the rain comes down.

This bears his missives of life and death
With quickening breath,
On whom the rain comes down.

One watches for signals of wreck or war
From the hill afar,
On whom the rain comes down.

No care if he gain a shelter or none,
Unhired moves one,
On whom the rain comes down.

And another knows nought of its chilling fall
Upon him at all,
On whom the rain comes down.

**The original text uses 'comes' instead of 'falls' in stanzas 4 and 6.*

4 Dream-Song

Walter de la Mare

Sunlight, moonlight,
Twilight, starlight.
Gloaming at the close of day,
And an owl calling,
Cool dews falling
In a wood of oak and may.

Lantern-light, taper-light,
Torchlight, no-light:
Darkness at the shut of day,
And lions roaring,
Their wrath pouring
In wild waste places far away.

Elf-light, bat-light,
Touchwood-light and toad-light,
And the sea a shimmering gloom of grey,
And a small face smiling
In a dream's beguiling
In a world of wonders far away.

*Our grateful thanks to The Literary
Trustees of Walter de la Mare and the
Society of Authors as their representative
for permission to print this text.*

Texts

THREE SONGS FROM WILLIAM BLAKE

5 The Shepherd

How sweet is the Shepherd's sweet lot!
From the morn to the evening he strays;
He shall follow his sheep all the day,
And his tongue shall be filled with praise.

For he hears the lamb's innocent call,
And he hears the ewe's tender reply;
He is watchful while they are in peace,
For they know when their Shepherd is nigh.

6 Ah, Sun-flower!

Ah, Sun-flower! weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the Sun:
Seeking after that sweet golden clime
Where the traveller's journey is done.

Where the Youth pined away with desire,
And the pale Virgin shrouded in snow
Arise from their graves and aspire
Where my Sun-flower wishes to go.

7 To Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love: The Divine Image

To Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love
All pray in their distress;
And to these virtues of delight
Return their thankfulness.

For Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love
Is God, our father dear,
And Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love
Is Man, his child and care.

For Mercy has a human heart,
Pity a human face,
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress.

Then every man, of every clime,
That prays in his distress,
Prays to the human form divine,
Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace.

And all must love the human form,
In heathen, Turk, or Jew;
Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell
There God is dwelling too.

Biographies

Amy Carson

Amy Carson was the youngest of the first girl choristers at Salisbury Cathedral. She went on to be a choral scholar at Trinity College, Cambridge. She has made highly acclaimed appearances on the opera stage and screen, most notably starring as Pamina in Kenneth Branagh's film of *The Magic Flute* when she was only 21.

She has performed internationally both as a soloist and ensemble singer with many professional groups, including The Sixteen, the Monteverdi Choir, The Gabrieli Consort and the OAE.

www.amycarsonsoprano.com



Biographies

Nicola Rose

Nicola Rose began her musical training as one of the first girl choristers at Salisbury Cathedral. She studied piano at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, where she is now a Junior Fellow, then at the National Opera Studio in London.

She works regularly as a répétiteur for Welsh National Opera, Longborough Festival Opera, Music Theatre Wales, Barefoot Opera, BBC National Chorus of Wales, and as a vocal coach in Italy, Switzerland and Oxenfoord. Nicola works as a pianist and Music Leader for the charity, The Forget-Me-Not Chorus.





Biographies

Hugh Benham

Hugh Benham, a Wiltshireman by birth, is a graduate of the University of Southampton (BA and PhD). He is organist and choir director at an Anglican church nearby, and editor of 'Laudate', a church-music magazine. He has written books and articles on Tudor music, notably the works of John Taverner, and textbooks for A-Level Music. Most of his sacred choral music has been published by UMP and was recorded by Convivium Records (CR011 and CR050) in the 2010s. He has since diversified, beginning with a collection of solo piano music in 2021 (CR061 – *For Piano*). Music for piano duet and for two pianos has followed, together with the solo songs recorded here, and chamber music (for solo instruments and piano, and for string quartet).

www.hughbenham.co.uk

Credits

HUGH BENHAM

Songs for Times and Seasons

Soprano Amy Carson Piano Nicola Rose

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Amy Carson Photography Gerard Collett

Nicola Rose Photography Gemma Griffiths

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