

SUMMER  
 *fling*  
SINGERS  
presents

*Lifecycles*

Madrigals about life and loss by John Wilbye and Robert Pearsall

Saturday, August 24, 2024 ~ 7:00pm  
St. Margaret's Episcopal Church, Bellevue

*How bright in the Maytime* ..... Robert Pearsall  
*Sweet honey-sucking bees / Yet, Sweet, take heed* ..... John Wilbye



*Lay a Garland* ..... Robert Pearsall  
*Sweet as a flower in May* ..... Robert Pearsall  
*Draw on, sweet night* ..... John Wilbye



*The Bishop of Mentz* ..... Robert Pearsall  
*Adieu! my native shore* ..... Robert Pearsall  
*Flora gave me fairest flowers* ..... John Wilbye  
*O ye roses* ..... Robert Pearsall  
*Ah! cannot sighs nor tears* ..... John Wilbye



*Shoot, false Love, I care not* ..... Robert Pearsall  
*Weep, weep mine eyes* ..... John Wilbye  
*Summer is ycoming in* ..... Robert Pearsall

# JOHN WILBYE

John Wilbye (1574–1638) was born in Brome, in the Suffolk county of England. Few details of his early years are documented, but it is known that he spent several decades working at Hengrave Hall, near Bury St. Edmonds, also in Suffolk county. Hengrave Hall was the seat of the Kitson and Gage families, who were Roman Catholic recusants, refusing to attend Church of England services after the 1593 schism.

Although it seems logical that Wilbye would have produced sacred works given his position, there are very few examples known. Rather, he preferred to focus on madrigals, publishing two collections, in 1598 and 1608, together comprising 64 works.



# ROBERT LUCAS PEARSALL

Robert Pearsall (1795–1856) was born in Bristol, England, where grew up, married, had four children, and worked as a barrister. After suffering a stroke in 1825, he moved with his family to Germany, eventually settling in Karlsruhe. In 1842, he separated from his wife and bought a ruined medieval castle near Rorschach, Switzerland, which he restored over course of several years.

Largely self-taught as a composer, Pearsall was a prolific amateur who wrote everything from orchestral works to church anthems to madrigals. Even after his move to Germany he was active in the Bristol Madrigal Society, which was the motivation for many of his madrigal compositions. The majority of Pearsall's output was only discovered and published after his death.



## *How bright in the Maytime*

Robert Lucas Pearsall

This light opening ditty was first published in 1863, then later included in a Pearsall-only part-song collection released by Novello in 1877. Set to a text by the mysterious Mrs. Newnham, it is a straightforward celebration of nature and springtime.

How bright in the Maytime  
Is freedom, is play-time,  
The forest, how bright!  
One's path gaily shaping,  
The city escaping  
To some breezy height.  
In hedge-braided meadows,  
Where cool welcome shadows  
With sun flecks are blent,  
Down lazily sinking,  
Deliciously drinking  
The lilac's rich scent.

Then onward one passes,  
Plucks wild flowers and grasses,  
And strawberries sweet;  
Fresh green boughs selecting,  
Our faces protecting  
From dust and from heat.  
Now heedlessly wander,  
Now pausing to ponder,  
The streamlet beside;  
Half dreaming, half waking,  
We watch the waves breaking,  
As softly they glide.

No porter to warn us,  
No gard'ner to scorn us,  
With threatening call.  
Here gold is not wanting,  
The field flowers enchanting,  
Are common to all.  
O freedom, how pleasant!  
No despot is present  
Sweet Nature to snare;  
No false-hearted flatt'rer,  
No tale-bearing chatt'rer,  
Here poisons the air.



*Sweet honey-sucking bees*  
*Yet, Sweet, take heed*  
John Wilbye

This two-part madrigal deftly mixes all the traditional madrigal themes of life, love, nature, and death into one. The revered Melisuavia, whose lips are coveted, yet only to be admired from afar, does not appear to be a reference to any particular person or mythical figure of note.

Sweet honey-sucking bees, why do you still  
Surfeit on roses, pinks and violets,  
As if the choicest nectar lay in them  
Wherewith you store your curious cabinets?

Ah, make your flight to Melisuavia's lips.  
There may you revel in ambrosian cheer,  
Where smiling roses and sweet lilies sit,  
Keeping their springtide graces all the year.

Yet, sweet, take heed, all sweets are hard to get:  
Sting not her soft lips, Oh, beware of that;  
For if one flaming dart come from her eye,  
Was never dart so sharp, ah, then you die!



*Lay a garland*  
Robert Lucas Pearsall

Along with his setting of *In dulci jubilo*, this piece for eight voices is probably Pearsall's most often-performed work. The text is taken from the 1619 play "A Maid's Tragedy," written by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher. These words are sung as a song by Aspasia, when her beloved is forced to choose another person to marry due to the king's orders.

Lay a garland on her hearse of dismal yew.  
Maidens, willow branches wear; say she died true.  
Her love was false, but she was firm.  
Upon her buried body lie lightly, thou gentle earth.



*Sweet as a flower in May*  
Robert Lucas Pearsall

Many of Pearsall's madrigals, like this one, are short and sweet, which is why you might notice a bit of an imbalance in the number of works included by each composer.

Sweet as a flower in May is my heart's treasure.  
See! she cometh fresh and gay  
To taste the spring;  
Ev'ry living thing doth honour to her charms!

All that bloometh throughout nature  
Longs to deck the lovely creature;  
The flowers do bring  
Their perfume rich to greet her.

Say, have you seen her smile?  
There's nothing sweeter.  
She is so fair, so wondrous fair,  
That earth and air  
Alike are charmed to meet her.



*Draw on, sweet night*  
John Wilbye

This madrigal for six voices is, like most of the composer's works in our program, taken from Wilbye's *Second Set of Madrigals for 3, 4, 5, and 6 voices*, published in 1609. Here we find Wilbye in a more somber, reflective mood, captured both by his lyrics and his music.

Draw on, sweet Night, best friend unto those cares  
That do arise from painful melancholy.  
My life so ill through want of comfort fares,  
That unto thee I consecrate it wholly.

Sweet Night, draw on! My griefs when they be told  
To shades and darkness, find some ease from paining.  
And while thou all in silence dost enfold,  
I then shall have best time for my complaining.



## *The Bishop of Mentz*

John Wilbye

Is this perhaps the darkest text in the madrigal literature? You decide! The poem depicts an old, unsubstantiated German legend regarding Hatto II, Archbishop of Mentz (Mainz) from 968–970 A.D., who was known to be cruel and unforgiving toward the peasants in his domain. After the events described here, the legend says that he was attacked by an army of mice and fled across a river to a tower (the famous Mouse Tower—Google it!) where he met his ignoble end at the hands (claws? teeth?) of his rodent pursuers.

The Bishop of Mentz was a wealthy prince,  
Wealthy and proud was he,  
And he'd all that was worth a wish on earth,  
But he had not charity.  
He would stretch out his empty hands to bless,  
Or lift them both to pray,  
But alack! to lighten man's distress,  
They moved no other way.

A famine came, but his heart was still  
As hard as his pride was high,  
And the starving poor but thronged his door  
To curse him and to die.  
At length from the crowd rose a clamour so loud,  
That a cruel plot laid he:  
He opened one of his granaries wide,  
And bade them enter free.

In they rushed, the maid and the sire,  
And the child that could barely run;  
Then he closed the barn and set it on fire,  
And burnt them ev'ry one.  
And loud he laughed at each terrible shriek,  
And cried to his archer train,  
"The merry mice how they squeak,  
They are fond of the Bishop's grain."



## *Adieu! my native shore*

Robert Lucas Pearsall

If the music for this madrigal sounds somewhat familiar, you're right: this is Pearsall's reimagining of the famous Renaissance tune *Innsbruck, ich muß dich lassen* by Heinrich Isaac (ca. 1450–1517). Rather than using a translation of the original German text, Pearsall instead opted for excerpts from the 1818 epic poem *Childe Harold's Good Night* by George Gordon Byron (Lord Byron), which expresses similar sentiments.

Adieu! adieu! my native shore,  
Fades o'er the waters blue;  
The night-winds sigh, the breakers roar,  
And shrieks the wild sea-mew.

Yon sun upon the sea,  
We follow in his flight,  
Farewell awhile to him and thee,  
My native land, good night!

With thee, my bark, I'll swiftly go  
Athwart the foaming brine,  
Nor care what land thou bear'st me to,  
So not again to mine.

Welcome, ye blue waves,  
And when ye fail my sight,  
Welcome ye deserts and ye caves,  
My native land, good night!



## *Flora gave me fairest flowers*

John Wilbye

One recurring character you're bound to encounter when singing madrigals is fair Phyllis. Believed to be more of a feminine ideal than any one particular person or goddess, Phyllis is the subject of countless songs from many different composers in the Renaissance and beyond. This madrigal for five voices is the only one in our program from Wilbye's first collection, published in 1598.

Flora gave me fairest flowers,  
None so fair in Flora's treasure.

These I placed on Phyllis' bowers.  
She was pleased, and she my pleasure.

Smiling meadows seem to say:  
Come, ye wantons, here to play.



## *O ye roses*

Robert Lucas Pearsall

After being passed over for fair Phyllis in the last piece by Wilbye, Flora gets her due here thanks to Pearsall. And yet the form still demands that someone—or something—be on the losing end of comparison, and here it is the poor roses, alas.

O ye roses, so blooming and fair!  
Go hide your soft blushes, and droop in despair.  
For Flora is coming, my shepherdess true,  
And she is a thousand times fairer than you.  
See she comes, the pride of Spring!  
United, welcome let us sing.  
Long live our beauteous Queen of May!  
To laud her is our duty.  
For in amaze all things do gaze,  
Enraptured of her beauty.



## *Ah! cannot sighs nor tears*

John Wilbye

So many madrigals are about, love, or love leading to death—and this one is no exception. The sheer melodrama of it all certainly can seem a bit much to our modern sensibilities, but Wilbye milks it for all its worth in this piece.

Ah, cannot sighs, nor tears, nor aught else move thee  
To pity me, who more than life do love thee?  
O cruel fates, see now away she's flying;  
And fly she will, alas, and leave me dying.  
Farewell, most fair, farewell, yet more disdainful.  
Was never grief like mine, nor death more painful.



## *Got a thing for Summer Fling?*

This is our 8<sup>th</sup> year singing together!

Summer Fling Singers  
is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit charity

Please consider making a  
*tax-deductible donation*  
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great music together!

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Thank you for supporting us!

## *Shoot, false Love, I care not*

Robert Lucas Pearsall

Apparently unafraid to wear his influences on his sleeve, Pearsall took the text from Thomas Morley's 1595 madrigal of the same name, and decided to compose his own take on the subject. Early versions of this piece were created sometime before 1837 in England as part of a ballet, while later revisions were made after his move to Germany. The "fa la las," originally omitted, were only added back in these later versions.

Shoot, false Love! I care not;  
Spend thy shafts and spare not!  
Fa la la!

I fear not thy might,  
And less I weigh thy spite!  
See! see! I unarm me,  
If thou canst, now shoot and harm me!  
So lightly I esteem thee  
As now a child I deem thee.  
Fa la la!

Long thy bow did fear me,  
While thy pomp did blear me;  
Fa la la!

But now I perceive  
Thy art is to deceive;  
And every simple lover  
All thy falsehood can discover.  
Then weep, Love, and be sorry,  
For thou hast lost thy glory.  
Fa la la!



## *Weep, weep, mine eyes*

John Wilbye

Found in Wilbye's second publication, this madrigal is presented as a dialog between two star-crossed lovers, Flaminia and Leander, who are unafraid of death and seek to be reunited in the afterlife. Although the source of the text is unknown, it has been suggested that it may be excerpted from a drama presented at Hengrave Hall during Wilbye's tenure there.

This piece is unique in being the first repeat performance in the Summer Fling Singers' history. We originally premiered it as part of our program *Legends, Lands, & Laments* back in 2019.

Weep, weep, mine eyes, my heart can take no rest.  
Weep, weep, my heart, mine eyes shall ne'er be blest.

Weep eyes, weep heart, and both this accent cry:  
A thousand deaths I die, Flaminia.

Ay me, ah cruel Fortune! ay me.

Now, Leander, to die I fear not.  
Death, do thy worst! I care not!

I hope when I am dead in Elysian plain  
To meet, and there with joy we'll love again.



## *Summer is ycoming in*

Robert Lucas Pearsall

We conclude our program this evening with a modern (well, 19<sup>th</sup> century modern) take on a Medieval classic. Based on the original 13<sup>th</sup> century round also known as “the Cuckoo song,” Pearsall created this arrangement for six voices in 1837. The source of the modernized text is unknown

Unfortunately, Pearsall’s composition was not well received in its time. As one contemporary review states: “His antiquarian interest in the piece superseded his musical inventiveness. His arrangement of the original is not very convincing and rather dull.”

We hope you disagree!

Summer is ycoming in,  
Loud sing cuckoo!

Groweth seed and bloweth mead,  
And springeth the weed new.  
Loud sing cuckoo!

Ewe is bleating after lamb,  
And calf crieth after cow;  
Deer are belling, buds are swelling,  
Merrie sing cuckoo, well sings the cuckoo.

Be silent never now,  
Loud sing cuckoo!



## ABOUT OUR CONDUCTOR

Giselle Wyers (she/her/hers) is the Donald E. Petersen Endowed Professor of Choral Music at the University of Washington, where she conducts the award-winning University Chorale and teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in choral conducting and music education. Wyers is the conductor of Concord Chamber Choir, and her professional project choir Solaris Vocal Ensemble specializes in the performance of contemporary American choral literature.

Wyers maintains an active schedule as guest conductor of high school honor choirs and has conducted All-States in the Pacific NW, Kansas, Wisconsin, Nevada, Louisiana, Nebraska, and Alaska. She has conducted semi-professional ensembles across the United States and in Germany, the Netherlands, Estonia, and Sweden.

Wyers’ choral works are published by Santa Barbara Music Publishing Company as part of the “Giselle Wyers Choral Series,” and with MusicSpoke and earthsongs. Her catalog of commissions for chorus, orchestra, wind ensemble, chamber music forces and solo song include 36 discrete works, including a 30-minute cycle entitled *And All Shall Be Well* that premiered at Carnegie Hall in 2022. Wyers is committed to mentoring scholar-writers in the field, and serves on the editorial board of ACDA’s Choral Journal and as a board member of ACDA’s Standing Committee on International Activities.

# ABOUT SUMMER FLING SINGERS — [summerfling.org](http://summerfling.org)

We are a group of choir ~~needs~~ singers who join together for three weeks in the late summer to sing new genres and gain small ensemble experience.

During the traditional choral year, our members participate in various local community choirs including Sine Nomine, Redmond Chorale, Cascadian Chorale, Kirkland Choral Society, Opus 7, as well as several area church choirs.

We'd like to thank this year's coach and conductor, Giselle Wyers, for helping us refine our sound as an ensemble.

We also wish to thank St. Margaret's Episcopal Church for graciously supporting our efforts and hosting both our rehearsals and our concert.

Be sure to visit [summerfling.org](http://summerfling.org) for the latest news and concert info, or email [info@summerfling.org](mailto:info@summerfling.org) if you are interested in participating or supporting us in the future.

Summer Fling Singers is a registered 501(c)(3) organization. Donations are tax-deductible.

## WHO WE ARE

*Artistic Director*

Aaron Giles

*Coach & Conductor*

Giselle Wyers

*Soprano*

Elisabeth Baeskens

Vera Giles

Heather Irwin

*Tenor*

Aaron Giles

Christopher Kruse

John La Fond

*Alto*

Dawn Fosse Cook

Gail Erickson

Elaine Tsang

*Bass*

Jeremy Kings

Trevor Tsang

Doug Wyatt

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