

Diary of the Bee

Chamber Works by Helen Leach

Victoria String Quartet
Richard Simpson, oboe

John Bradbury, clarinet
Simon Leach, piano



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1.	Prelude for a Royal Swan	3:34
2.	Tenera Caritate	10:01
	Where Hope Was Sown	
3.	I. The Day of the Peewits' Return	2:50
4.	II. Arabesque at the Pond	2:42
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	Diary of the Bee	
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11.	II. Thistle (Air)	3:31
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19.	Face of Love (Air)	2:49
20.	Star Dance (Gigue)	3:05
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23.	Song without Words	4:07
24.	Cup of Kindness	4:26



Total playing time 87:33



Composer's Notes

Prelude for a Royal Swan

Prelude for a Royal Swan was composed especially for my husband, Simon, to play on the organ, as a Reflection at the opening of the morning service at Canongate Kirk, Edinburgh, on the 6th February 2022, thus marking the 70th Anniversary of the Accession to the Throne of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Canongate Kirk serves Holyrood House and Edinburgh Castle, and the late Queen herself, as well as other members of the royal household, have followed in the footsteps of bygone generations, in attending the Kirk for worship. In August 2023, *Prelude for a Royal Swan* was played there in the presence of HRH Prince Edward, Duke of Edinburgh, and the work has been featured on Radio 3 Breakfast.

With an undulating accompaniment flowing through different harmonies, the expansive melody seeks to portray the beauty, dignity and unwavering commitment of the late Queen.

Tenera Caritate

With its outstanding natural beauty and rich history of Christianity, the Holy Island of Lindesfarne has been a place of personal pilgrimage and peace for most of my life. Inspired on a visit in February 2023, the opening of *Tenera Caritate* depicts the afternoon sunlight on the lapping waves around the south side of the tidal island. I wrote *Tenera Caritate* that spring and dedicated the work to my husband, Simon.

With the Latin title meaning 'Tender Love', this expressive rhapsody for Clarinet in A and String Quartet is in free form. Deeply evocative, with woven instrumental textures and flowing romantic lyricism, it journeys through a whole spectrum of harmonic

shades. The music, marked *Adagio teneramente*, speaks simply and directly from and to the human heart, of love that brings hope and healing; that yearns and searches; that sustains us through the journey, embraces us in the storm, and brings us peace.

Where Hope Was Sown

Where Hope Was Sown, commissioned by the former Marchmont Makers Foundation to be dedicated to Mr Oliver Burge of Marchmont Farms Ltd, relates to his favourite bird, the Lapwing. Known in Scotland as the ‘peewit’ which mimics the plaintive cry of the bird’s call, the oboe seemed particularly well suited to portray both the forlorn character and wonderful agility of the Lapwing, as well as capturing the pastoral ambience of their habitat in the outstretched fields of the Lowlands.

Many thoughts about environmental issues and the corollary decline in recorded numbers came to me, as well as a growing appreciation of the distinctive beauty of the Lapwing’s appearance, with its timeless elegance as a wader, iridescent plumage, extravagant crest, wavering flight and spectacular aerobatic displays. A musical poem began to flow from the pen, weaving together six defined sections which each relate to some aspect of the Lapwing, before coming to rest with a sense of deep peace.

The première was given by Richard Simpson and the Victoria String Quartet on Friday 6th October 2023 in St Mary’s Preparatory School, Melrose, close to the River Tweed where Lapwings are often seen.



I. The Day of the Peewits' Return

As Earth stirs and the frosted ground
Wakes from winter's slumbering,
The ear catches the keen, clear sound
Of the peewits returning;
The eye traces above, around
The rising hills, wondering
That new horizons yet abound.
Hope, her seeds now scattering
Upon the empty, furrowed ground,
Promises her strength to bring

IV. Wings of the Rainbow

On the wings of the rainbow,
Beaming with the purest light,
And colours new;
On the wings of the rainbow,
Dreaming of the highest height,
Where Truth is true.
Shimmers of iridescence,
Glimmers of Love's radiance;
Glinting on the feather,
Glimpsing the forever,
On the wings of the rainbow.

II. Arabesque at the Pond

Graceful, lithe and delicate,
So still and statuesque:
Peewits, poised and elegant,
Compose their arabesque
To St Cecilia's sweet call
O'er the cool, lulling waves:
A breathtaking, flightless dance.
Pond reeds reaching up tall
In the mirrored waters, gaze
Upon this timeless stance.

V. Of Crown and Field

Hope
On fields of gold;
Triumph's flag rolled
Around each humble stalk.
They walk
Through furrows long.
A rising song
Of majestic vict'ry
Wings free
Through silvery cloud,
Towards The Plough
And to Cygnus, soaring,
Sowing
Hope
On fields of gold.

III. Rising Kings

Powerful as kings
Mounting on wings:
Stirring, swooping, swirling!
Brave crowns now thrown
Where Hope was sown:
Zestful, daring,
Nothing sparing,
Twisting, tumbling, twirling!
Bold, to the skies
The kings arise!

VI. Gentle Earth

Hush, little Earth, hush,
For Hope wings her melody
Up yonder in the sky;
And soothes with sweet harmony
The pain of nature's cry.
Her touch of tranquillity
And warmth of golden ray,
Envelop in eternity
The dim world's shortening day.
Hush, gentle Earth, hush.

Words by Helen Leach © 2023



A Melrose Rhapsody

A Melrose Rhapsody was first performed in February 2022 by Benedict Holland and Simon Leach, in the charming, small town of Melrose in the Scottish Borders. This lyrical and melodious piece speaks of the prayerful spirituality of the ancient ruins of Melrose Abbey, together with the beautiful surrounding countryside of the Borderlands with rolling hills and open skies. The gentle, flowing nine-eight meter reflects the waters of the River Tweed; and the musical contours, exploring the heights and depths of the violin range, depict a landscape that speaks of timelessness and peace. The rhapsody begins with the distant sound of a bell-like piano chord, and the violin emerges, as though through the mist.

Melrose, where the echo of monks' bells infuses the flowing waters;
Fragrant gardens, laden with fruit, overwhelm the soul with grace;
And throughout the centuries, a trinity of Eildon Hills watches over with loving gaze.

Words by Helen Leach © 2022

Diary of the Bee

One of my favourite childhood memories is of spending hours in our garden, gathering petals to make flower perfumes. Many years later, in the summer of 2023, I sat, reminiscently, with wildflowers in jam jars on my piano and composed *Diary of the Bee*. Seeking to portray the essence of each of the wildflowers in turn, their beautiful hues, intriguing fragrances, and delicate petal shapes, together with the symbolism of each and many personal associations, it proved to be one of my happiest-ever writing experiences. The première was given by John Bradbury and the Victoria String Quartet, at St Mary's Preparatory School, Melrose on Friday 5th October, just before they recorded the work, over at Marchmont House. It was a joy for me to narrate the verses of *Diary of the Bee* to an audience full of wide-eyed young children, and the work is dedicated to our five daughters, Rose, Elisabeth, Mary, Victoria and Katherine.



1. Prelude

Bluebell waves in the breeze,
And opens her lips
To tell the world how free is
The humble heart
Whose melody sweeps
Across the glen.
And beyond.



2. Air

Thistle stands with noble dignity
In the barren landscape of history:
Symbol of strength;
Crown of courage;
Promise of protection;
Whisper of wisdom.



3. Scherzo

Forget-me-not. Forget-me-not!
Promise?
Tinkling and whirling
Twinkling and swirling,
From five tiny petals,
I spy the bright-eyed face of friendship!



4. Romanza

Wild Rose blooms in the lane;
Beauty of innocence with
Thorn of experience.
Sweet perfumes in the air;
Love in its fullness,
Heartbeat of grace.



5. Introduction and Capriccio

Buttercup gleams in the morning meadow;
Joyfully beams with a dawning yellow.
Whimsical happiness:
Laughter and wit.
Nimble light-heartedness:
Scamper and skip!
'Catch me, if you can!'



Letters from the Owl House



Letters from the Owl House was largely composed in the Tower Studio in Marchmont, Berwickshire, in August 2022. Metaphysical in concept and rooted in the musical tradition of the Suite, the six movements have traits of the historic Baroque dances, whilst retaining an improvisatory style. Dedicated to Hugo Burge, whose love for owls inspired him to build several owl houses across the Marchmont Estate, the work reflects aspects of the behaviour and habitat of owls, whilst seeking to capture the beauty of the night sky in this unspoilt part of the world. With their extraordinary hearing, owls are often seen to symbolise deep wisdom, and these six fantastical musical letters offer a moment to reflect upon six questions:

I. When? II. What? III. Where? IV. Why? V. Who? VI. How?

Jennifer Langridge gave the first performance by firelight in the Lorimer Music Room at Marchmont on 21st January 2023.

Syzygy (Prelude)

Inspired by a beautiful supermoon, *Syzygy* was composed with the huge golden moon profiled in the Tower Studio window. Free and lyrical, this Prelude portrays the timelessness of the beyond, with fluid rhythms and ecstatic melodic shapes exploring the spiritual realm as one steps into the wonder of a kairos moment. The lunar cycle is loosely depicted with the cycle of 5ths and, here, we may comprehend ‘When’ as might owls: waiting quietly and flowing with the rhythm of the universe.

Treasures of Darkness (Allemande)

When composing *Treasures of Darkness*, I imagined the Owl House built with sapphires, emeralds and rubies, and the spread chords in the music depict the unfolding of revelations: perhaps Truth, Wisdom, Strength and Peace, portrayed in a bossa nova style Allemande. In ‘What’ should one place value?

Touch of Heaven (Courante)

In the Courante, *Touch of Heaven*, the owls fly, high above, through the spectacular night sky, maybe a meteor in their midst, perhaps the gleam of unknown galaxies. With the slow beat of their strong, broad wings depicted musically as falling arpeggios, in that process of journeying and searching ‘Where’, they are found, soaring in the extravagance of the Divine.

Broken Oak (Sarabande)

The devastating recent storms, which have brought so much tree damage to Marchmont, raises the hard question of 'Why'. Capturing the feeling of despair when things of seeming permanence are blighted, the desolate, question-like Theme of this Sarabande evolves into a set of Variations with a sense of increasing agitation. The owls visit and revisit the scene of the *Broken Oak*.

Face of Love (Air)

The barn owlets gaze in wonder upon their parents' striking heart-shaped faces in the Owl House. *Face of Love* has the flavour of a Scots Air, a lullaby for the owlets in the nest, with the tender simplicity of the opening melody shifting into the minor key for the middle section as the ache of deep love is expressed. Perhaps it is in Love that the question of 'Who' can best be answered.

Star Dance (Gigue)

As the owls wake to bathe in the mystery of the night sky, this playful Gigue, *Star Dance*, depicts the energy, drama and seeming randomness of the universe, with a roll call for the names of each of the stars in turn spoken across the registers of the 'cello. Awestruck in the face of the majesty of the celestial array, 'How' is expressed as an attitude of wonder, with this stellar dance offering the final word of wisdom in the *Letters from the Owl House*.



An Edinburgh Farewell

An Edinburgh Farewell was composed in 2021 to pay homage to His Royal Highness, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. The piece was written for my husband, Simon, to play on the Frobenius Organ of Canongate Kirk, Edinburgh, for a special Memorial Service, held there on 18th April of that year, the day after the royal funeral in St George's Chapel, Windsor.

I tried to capture the character of the Duke in the piece, with bold salutes, expressive idiosyncratic gestures and hints of nostalgia. Creating an accessible Scottish style, evocative of the glens, the musical landscape is infused with both military-like rhythmic precision and romantic lyricism. A great sense of journeying and purpose propels the music onwards, until the intimacy of the final farewell, which brings peace and rest.

The Black Rood of Scotland

I composed *The Black Rood of Scotland* at the outset of lockdown in March 2020, in the outhouse of my late father's cottage in Hawick, in the Scottish Borders, where we were staying at the time. Facing the unprecedented turmoil and grief of the pandemic, I wanted to connect with the Christian roots of the country, and, with its stream of melody and rich harmony, the work is a depiction of the love and longing of Christ upon the Cross. Written as a personal devotion for Holy Week, my husband, Simon, gave its first performance later that year, once churches reopened, on the Frobenius Organ of Canongate Kirk, Edinburgh, for Remembrance Sunday.

The Black Rood of Scotland itself, sadly now lost, was the holy relic from which 'Holyrood' took its name. It was brought to the country by Saint Margaret of Scotland (1045-1093), who became a Scottish queen when she married King Malcolm III. It is believed that the young queen clutched this priceless royal treasure on her deathbed in Edinburgh Castle.

Song without Words

As I sat down to play the piano at home late one evening in June 2023, I experienced an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the life and generosity of the late Hugo Burge. He was a wonderful artistic philanthropist and the inspirational owner and restorer of Marchmont House, Berwickshire, where I have been Composer-in-Residence. A melody began to unfold. It was as though my heart sang, and

the music seemed to flow freely, winding its way, with gentleness and affection, through a palette of harmonic colours.

The piece was first performed a month later, at the Summer Serenade concert in the Lorimer Music Room at Marchmont House, by Benedict Holland and Simon Leach.

Full of elegance, charm and sensitivity, the musical conversation between violin and piano speaks, through the gift of music, of matters otherwise inexpressible, and so is, quintessentially, a ***Song without Words.***

Cup of Kindness

One of the most noble and iconic statements of Scottish culture is surely *Auld Lang Syne*, which is sung universally at New Year's Eve celebrations. The words were penned by none other than Robert Burns (1759 – 1796). In the chorus is the lovely line 'we'll tak a cup o' kindness yet'. It speaks to me of overflowing warmth and blessing which extends to the whole realm of our human relationships, and one morning, I couldn't help but start to write a short piece for Oboe and String Quartet which seeks to encapsulate the essence of that phrase, 'cup o' kindness'.

Following a short, dramatic opening musical declaration, the simple flowing melody of ***Cup of Kindness*** rises and falls nostalgically over a rocking accompaniment. The first violin then takes up the melody while the oboe sings with a countermelody. A freer improvisatory middle section gives way to a soaring reprise with a pizzicato 'cello bassline. Lyrical, tender and thoughtful, the work comes to rest with a sense of wellbeing and harmony.

Cup of Kindness is dedicated to our son, James, who celebrated the millennium as a baby.

Helen Leach 2024



Biographies

Helen Leach, composer

Born in Hawick, in the beautiful Scottish Borders, Helen enjoyed a rich and diverse musical upbringing, becoming Principal Clarinet with the National Youth Orchestra of Scotland. Former Head Girl of Hawick High School, she studied at the Royal Northern College of Music; a Virtuosi Society Bursary enabled additional Clarinet study with Gervase de Peyer in Washington DC.

After graduating, Helen worked for a number of years as a Director of Worship in Manchester and has directed the music for live BBC broadcasts, including her own compositions and arrangements on Radio 4. Her *Prelude for a Royal Swan* was featured on Radio 3 Breakfast on the anniversary of the Accession to the Throne of the late Queen, and she has recently conducted and arranged music for BBC Songs of Praise in Canongate Kirk, Edinburgh.

Helen is delighted to have returned to her homeland with her husband, Simon Leach and their family, and is loving her new lifestyle in this scenic part of the world, teaching and devoting more time to composition. Her music is published by United Music Publishing and has been performed recently in major venues such as St Patrick's Cathedral, New York; Leeds Catholic Cathedral; St Giles's Cathedral, Canongate Kirk and Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh; Laidlaw Music Centre, St Andrew's; Caird Hall, Dundee; and RNCM, Manchester.

She has greatly enjoyed being Composer-in-Residence at Marchmont House, Berwickshire and is enormously grateful to the former Marchmont Makers Foundation for generously enabling this recording, and to Mr Oliver Burge and Mr Henry Lakin of Marchmont Farms Limited for kindly allowing this recording to be made in the Music Room of Marchmont House.



Benedict Holland, violin solo & violin 1

Benedict Holland studied piano and violin at the Royal Academy of Music and was subsequently a prize winner at the Royal Northern College of Music, where he studied the violin with Yossi Zivoni. A keen chamber musician, he was a founder member of the Matisse Piano Quartet and the Music Group of Manchester and, until 2023, was the violinist and occasional violist with Psappha. He is currently a member of I Musicanti and the Victoria String Quartet. An experienced orchestral leader, he has guest-led many of the UK's major orchestras, including The Hallé, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Northern Sinfonia, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Scottish Ensemble, Orchestra of Opera North and BBC Philharmonic.

Ben puts teaching at the heart of his work and is a Professor at the RNCM and Visiting Artist at Trinity Laban Conservatoire.

David Greed, violin 2

David Greed studied at the Royal College of Music in London. In 1978 he was appointed Leader of the newly formed Orchestra of Opera North becoming the youngest leader in the country.

He has appeared regularly as soloist, both with the Opera North Orchestra and with other orchestras throughout the region. David has guest-led many orchestras including Philharmonia, City of Birmingham, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, BBC Philharmonic, BBC Scottish, The Hallé, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Northern Sinfonia, Bournemouth Sinfonietta, Royal Opera House, Orchestra of Welsh National Opera, Irish Chamber, Manchester Camerata, Northern Chamber Orchestra and English National Ballet. He has recorded 'The Lark Ascending' for Naxos with David Lloyd-Jones and the Orchestra of Opera North. This recording was used as part of the soundtrack to the movie 'Man on Wire' which won a BAFTA and an Oscar for 'Best British Documentary Film' in 2008.

Catherine Yates, viola

Catherine Yates is a violinist and viola player who is a keen chamber musician, orchestral player and educationalist. She spent twenty years as 2nd Violin of the Sorrel Quartet, performing and broadcasting at home and abroad and holding Artists-in-Residence positions at six of the UK's major universities. The Quartet recorded extensively for Chandos, including acclaimed discs of Elgar, Britten and the complete Quartets of Shostakovich. From 2008 she enjoyed six years as Principal 2nd Violin of The Hallé Orchestra before leaving to devote more of her time to education. She is

currently Deputy Head of Strings at the Royal Northern College of Music where she was herself a student, whilst continuing to perform as much as she can. Catherine is a regular guest viola player with the Victoria String Quartet.

Jennifer Langridge, cello

Following her studies at the Royal Northern College of Music where she was awarded the Barbirolli Prize for Cello, Jennifer Langridge lives in Manchester. Having played Guest Principal Cello for many of the major orchestras in the north, she is now Principal Cello of the Northern Chamber Orchestra and a member of the Victoria String Quartet. As well as being a professor at the Royal Northern College of Music, she teaches cello at Chetham's School of Music.

For 30 years, until 2023, Jennifer was Principal Cello of Psappha Ensemble. Psappha performed regularly on BBC Radio 3, made many CD recordings and has a YouTube channel of more than 300 films of live concerts. Jen often performed as a soloist with Psappha, most notably at the Royal Albert Hall for the BBC Proms in 2004, playing Maxwell Davies' *Linguae Ignis* for Solo Cello and Ensemble.

Richard Simpson, oboe

Richard Simpson studied at the Royal College of Music with Sydney Sutcliffe. Upon leaving, he was appointed by Pierre Boulez to the position of Sub-Principal Oboe with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and one year later was invited to join The Hallé as Principal Oboe. In his eighteen years with that orchestra, he had the opportunity of performing concerti by Mozart, Strauss, Vaughan Williams, Martinu and Hummel to critical acclaim.

In 1991 he returned to the BBC Symphony Orchestra, this time as Principal Oboe, a position he held for 27 years. He is now enjoying being involved in various chamber music activities and solo work. He was a professor at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama for 25 years. Richard's recordings include the oboe music of Thomas Pitfield, Benjamin Britten's *Metamorphoses* after Ovid, Rubbra's Oboe Sonata, and Sir John Manduell's Double Concerto for Oboe and Cor Anglais.

John Bradbury, clarinet

John Bradbury studied Natural Sciences at St John's College, Cambridge. He was awarded a Travel Scholarship to study clarinet with Larry Combs of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, then went on to the Royal Academy of Music where he won the Hawkes Clarinet Prize and the Principal's Prize.

John held the sub-principal chairs in the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and the London Symphony Orchestra, before his invitation to become Principal Clarinet with the BBC Philharmonic. He has played Guest Principal with all the major UK orchestras as well as with John Wilson's hand-picked orchestra at the Proms.

John has given many solo performances with the BBC Philharmonic, with highlights including the Mozart, Nielsen, Stanford and MacMillan Concertos. His recordings for Chandos include the Busoni Concertino, Malcolm Arnold "Scherzetto" (Editor's Choice in "The Gramophone") and Ben-Haim Pastorale variée. His celebrated Naxos disc "The English Clarinet" remains a bestseller, followed in 2023 by "From the Airwaves" on the MPR label.

John was awarded Fellowship of the Royal Academy of Music in 2018.

Simon Leach, piano

Simon Leach is a prize-winning graduate of the Royal Northern College of Music and a former Organ Scholar of the Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King. As a solo organist he has performed in many major concert halls and cathedrals, most notably at Westminster Cathedral, London and the Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Paris, as well as both St Patrick's Cathedral and The Church of St Thomas, 5th Avenue in New York. In addition to playing organ on Coronation Street, Simon has regularly played both organ and piano on BBC Radio 3 and 4. His recordings of Naji Hakim's organ music (Divine Art) have received excellent reviews from both sides of the Atlantic. Simon is currently Organist at Canongate Kirk, Edinburgh and Musical Director at Marchmont House in the Scottish Borders and has given many recent première performances of works by his wife, Helen Leach.



The Music Room, Marchmont House



Left to right:
Benedict Holland, David Greed, Catherine Yates,
Jennifer Langridge, Richard Simpson, John Bradbury,
Simon Leach.



The composer and musicians at Marchmont House

Marchmont House

The splendid 'Palladian' mansion of Marchmont House is nestled near Greenlaw, Berwickshire, in the rolling countryside of the Scottish Borders. Built in 1750 by the 3rd Earl of Marchmont, Hugh Hume-Campbell, major changes were made between 1914 and 1917 when the then owner, Robert Finnie McEwen, commissioned the eminent Scottish architect Sir Robert Lorimer to enlarge the house.

McEwen, himself, was a keen amateur musician and good friend of Charles Villiers Stanford whom he had met whilst studying at Cambridge, and his renovation included the addition of a stunning oak panelled Music Room, complete with a wonderful Norman, Hill and Beard pipe organ. In many ways, the Music Room, steeped in musical history with the connection to Stanford as well as Vaughan Williams, is the jewel of the whole house.

Marchmont House and Estate were acquired in more recent years by father and son Oliver and Hugo Burge for Marchmont Farms Limited, and following an assiduous programme of full restoration, was very deservedly awarded the Historic Houses Sotheby's Restoration Award in 2018. With a remarkable vision for supporting the Arts in the Scottish Borders and beyond, Hugo Burge lead the conversion of buildings in the estate to create studios and accomodation for 'Makers & Creators', and a programme of artists' residencies was set up, providing space and time to nurture genuine creativity and traditional crafts.

As Composer-in-Residence, Helen Leach wrote part of *Letters from the Owl House* in the Tower Studio and studied there in preparation for writing *Where Hope Was Sown*. The solo 'cello and the violin and piano works, as well as the two clarinet quintets included on this disc, have all been performed in the Music Room.



Recorded at Marchmont House 2023
Engineered by Philip Hobbs
Produced by Helen Leach and Philip Hobbs

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Cover, artwork and booklet design: James Cardell-Oliver - Divine Art

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