

## Music Reflection

### “Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness”

So runs the opening line of one of John Keats best loved poems “Ode to Autumn” and we ourselves have now come to the point in the year when we are in both the meteorological and astronomical season of that name. It is said that Keats wrote his poem after a September walk in the water meadows of Winchester which he took to escape the sound of his landlady’s daughter playing the violin, but the tone of the poem is probably set by the fact that, at the time of writing, Keats knew that he was in the autumn of his short life (25 years) as he was already suffering from the tuberculosis that would soon claim him.

Although Autumn may be viewed with the somewhat negative aspect of decline and growing darkness it is also a time of the most glorious colours and fruitfulness which gives us, yet again, a glimpse of the wonder of God’s creation which is ours to enjoy and, for which, we have a responsibility to care. Autumn provides us with a reminder of the cycle of life and the value of all its seasons but especially in Autumn we have the chance to make time to take in the ephemeral beauty of this season, to reflect on our lives, what we want to harvest and treasure and what aspects have perhaps come to their natural end and need to be let go.

For my music suggestions I have taken the season of Autumn and I hope offered a variety of pieces that reflect different aspects of this lovely time, but first, let us enjoy the words of John Keats.

*Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,  
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;  
Conspiring with him how to load and bless  
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;  
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,  
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;  
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells  
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,  
And still more, later flowers for the bees,  
Until they think warm days will never cease,  
For summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.*

*Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?  
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find  
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,  
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;  
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,  
Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook  
Spare the next swath and all its twined flowers:  
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep  
Steady thy laden head across a brook;  
Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,  
Thou watchest the last oozy hours by hours.*

*Where are the songs of spring? Ay, Where are they?  
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—  
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,  
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;  
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn  
Among the river sallows, borne aloft  
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;  
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;  
Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft  
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;  
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.*

Veljo Tormis (1930-2017) was an Estonian composer born into a musical family where his father was an organist and choral director. Tormis became a very successful choral composer, indeed is sometimes claimed to be Estonia's finest. Tormis based much of his, largely *a cappella*, music on folk tunes and this in the main spared it from soviet censorship despite some controversial themes particularly around the evils of war. "**Autumn Landscapes**" is a somewhat wistful collection of rather lovely songs which I think in many ways complement the tone of Keats poem.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WqdaV1u-4qU>

Alexander Konstantinovich Glazunov (1865-1936) was born in St. Petersburg, the son of a wealthy publisher, he began to study the piano aged nine followed by composition at age eleven. Glazunov was a talented student who came to the notice of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov whose private pupil he became. Glazunov had considerable success as a composer and an academic musician becoming a professor at St Petersburg Conservatory in 1899 and director in 1905 which post he continued to hold until 1930 surviving all the changes brought about as a consequence of the Russian Revolution.

Glazunov was a successful and respected teacher, his most well-known pupils being Dmitri Shostakovich and Nathan Milstein. One of Glazunov's best-known works today is the music to the ballet "The Seasons" by the choreographer Marius Petipa, this work was first performed in 1905 at Imperial Theatre of the Hermitage, Winter Palace, St. Petersburg at which the whole of the Imperial Court was present. We are going to hear **Autumn from Alexander Glazunov's The Seasons** performed here by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Vladimir Ashkenazy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jg6dZScORQk&t=32s>

Erik Satie (1866-1925) was a French composer and pianist; he was the son of a French father and a British mother. Satie studied at the Paris Conservatoire but was an undistinguished student and obtained no diploma. In the 1880s Satie worked as a pianist in café-cabaret in Montmartre, Paris, and began composing more serious works, mostly for solo piano, such as his *Gymnopédies* for which he is probably best known. Satie entered Paris's second music academy, the Schola Cantorum, as a mature student and his studies there were more successful than those at the Conservatoire. From about 1910 he became the focus of successive groups of young composers attracted by his unconventionality and originality. Among them were the group known as Les Six. A meeting with Jean Cocteau in 1915 led to the creation of the ballet *Parade* (1917) for Serge Diaghilev, with music by Satie, sets and costumes by Pablo Picasso and choreography by Léonide Massine. Most of Satie's work is composed for solo piano and much influenced by his love of gothic buildings and old church music. **The "Ogives"** are four pieces for piano composed by Satie in the late 1880s and are said to be inspired by the window arches at Notre Dame and to represent the sound of a large pipe organ. The pieces are, to my mind, totally haunting and certainly evocative of the darker days of autumn. "**Ogives**" are played here by the late Dutch pianist Reinbert de Leeuw who was recognised as perhaps the greatest interpreter of the works of Satie, the music is enhanced by the lovely images of the works of Monet.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hI7a0Eh\\_IPo&t=179s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hI7a0Eh_IPo&t=179s)

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) is of course one of the most well know and best loved English composers of more recent times. I have written at some length about him previously but will just remind you that in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Vaughan Williams travelled extensively around the country taking down country songs and folk music that might otherwise have been lost, these songs figured significantly in his later works. Vaughan Williams had a strong public service ethic despite coming from a privileged background and thus had a firm belief that music should be available and accessible to all. "**Folksongs of the Four Seasons**", a work for women's voices and orchestra, was written by RVW for the first singing festival of the National Federation of Women's Institutes. This was in 1951 - Festival of Britain year when idealism borne of the Second World War still resounded but with hopes for a new world. The work makes inspired use of the folksongs I mentioned earlier but is nowadays almost an unknown part of the composer's repertoire.

We are going to hear part III "**AUTUMN**" sung by the Female choir "Genti" from the Netherlands – as you will realise this is a lively and robust collection of songs and certainly not the ethereal drifting type of music some might associate with the season.

If you have enjoyed "Autumn" and would like to hear the remainder of the year do please follow the second link which will give you access to a vintage performance conducted by the great Sir David Willcocks.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dWetJEGQIU4>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2sXWM1V6-c&list=OLAK5uy\\_kOofBjR1V0PPRvefIBTwV6UR-tqeGE788](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2sXWM1V6-c&list=OLAK5uy_kOofBjR1V0PPRvefIBTwV6UR-tqeGE788)

Elizabeth Estelle White (1925 –2011) was a British composer who wrote over 160 hymns, several masses, and music for theatre. Estelle White had a varied and diverse life joining the ATS at the age of 17 and during WWII she played saxophone with an Army band and entertained troops in Egypt and Palestine. Following the war, Estelle trained as a physiotherapist and worked with children suffering cerebral palsy before moving to the USA where she joined the Roman Catholic Church. On returning to the UK in 1965 Estelle became a nun and then studied to become a teacher, she subsequently taught theology and music in Roman Catholic Schools in the North of England for the remainder of her life but, while doing so, also managed to study Hebrew and Greek, earning an MA with Distinction from Leeds University in 1989; she also directed the church choir at St Josephs, Dewsbury, from 1984 until 1991. Estelle White composed many hymns including her harvest hymn Autumn Days which I have only just discovered. The hymn caused controversy in 1996, when choir members of the 12th-century St. Mary's Church in Wroxham, Norfolk, walked out rather than sing the hymn. They found the reference to "jet planes meeting in air to be refuelled," to be inappropriate - White explained that she had written the hymn for the children at a school under a flight path to sing! More importantly the hymn reminds us that we should never forget to give thanks for everything that we receive in this world however grand or mundane that may be.

"**Autumn Days**" is sung here by Andrew Emison at Frodsham Methodist Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ByLoE8c6yAk>

"Autumn Leaves" is a popular song and jazz standard composed by Joseph Kosma in 1945 with original lyrics by Jacques Prévert in French (original French title: "Les Feuilles Mortes"), and later by Johnny Mercer in English. Kosma met Prevert in Paris and they collaborated on writing the song for a film 'Les Portes de la nuit' (Gates of the Night). The English version of the song had huge success there being over 1,000 commercial recordings by various artists. For something a little out of the ordinary I would like to offer this arrangement of the song for string quartet by the Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu which is played here by the French Ebene string quartet.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9-6lnnUeT4&t=148s>

To my mind there are few more sounds more glorious than an all-male cathedral or college choir singing a psalm or canticle to Anglican chant with a sympathetic organ accompaniment - where better than King's College Cambridge to hear that? It is absurd for me to make any observation regarding the merits of the recent Directors of Music at King's since Boris Ord as they have all been exceptional in their individual ways but, if I were asked for my favourite, I would nominate Sir David Willcocks without a moment of hesitation. As well as writing those wonderful carol descants we still enjoy at Christmas, Sir David did so much to develop and refine what might be described as the "King's sound" by matching the voices to the acoustic of the chapel. Psalm 104 could be named as the "Creation Psalm" giving, as it does, thanks to God for all aspects of creation, which of course includes the seasons. Here is the choir of King's singing **Psalm 104 under the direction of David Willcocks**. If you want an example of the way in which DW shaped the sound then listen carefully to the organ accompaniment especially in verses 20 -22 "Thou makest darkness that it may be night" and the pronunciation of "shall" in "ever shall be" in the gloria - was it "shall" or was it "shell"?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bnxu1j6ZcFA>

I am sure that some of you who have shown the fortitude to still be reading this have been waiting for that most well know musical representation of “**Autumn (from the Four Seasons) by Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)**” to appear and, here it is but perhaps not quite in the form that we might normally expect to hear it. Jonathan Scott is an organist of mercurial keyboard skills at the organ and the piano, he is also a recognised expert in music for the French art harmonium. As well as being Associate Artist at the Bridgewater Hall in Manchester where he regularly draws capacity audiences, he and his pianist brother Tom have a busy international concert schedule performing as the ‘Scott Brothers Duo’. We are going to hear Jonathan playing Autumn on the magnificent Schuke organ of St. Lamberti, Münster, Germany, I do hope you enjoy something a little different.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sP246iXyQ44>

Keith Day