

The programme is loosely inspired by Valentine's Day and more closely by Chaucer's poem 'Parlement of Foules' - an account of the birds' troubles having to choose a mate on St Valentine's day, eventually resolved in a good-natured way. However, in our programme it's the birds observing the humans and seeing a far less innocent picture.

In a triptych of stories, we have on the ends two contrasting versions of a ballad rooted in the tradition of courtly love - ravens contemplate dining on a slain knight's body with very different outcomes. In the middle of the triptych, the birds contemplate humans' springtime dalliances as they turn into love and betrayal, then keep the wounded company in their time of despair, and even ease their passing. All the while, they welcome spring and go about their lives, even take sustenance from the aftermath of human tragedies - all still in a good-natured way.

Ravens: 'The three ravens' was collected/composed by Thomas Ravenscroft and published in 1611; it probably has its origins in the late Middle Ages. It's counterpart, 'The twa corbies', was collected much later by Sir Walter Scott, with no tune, here set to a tune found in a 17th century Scottish manuscript, to match the Scots origins of the text.

Henry VIII: He was the embodiment of both the good and bad sides of stereotypical masculinity, at least in his youth. He lived up to knightly ideals in some ways, but had a peculiar history with women. The music from this section includes composers featured in the Henry VIII manuscript. The texts are often filled with double meanings, especially about things that happen in the greenwood (in the woods or in nature).

Kemp's jig (one variant called 'The parlement'): *William Kempe* - famous comedian of the time, who worked with Shakespeare. *Jig* - In theatres, beginning in Elizabethan London, a jig was a short comic drama that immediately followed a full-length play.

Tomorrow is St Valentine's day: one of Ophelia's songs, Hamlet Act 4 Scene 5, sung to one of the well-known ballad tunes of the time, 'Souldier's life'.

Robin is to the greenwood gone: one of the most popular tunes of the time, also used for one of Ophelia's songs.

Willow, willow: A ballad that Shakespeare used with slight alterations in Othello - Desdemona sings it before her death. A willow garland was an emblem of the forsaken.

O Death: Anne Boleyn was a victim of her partner in a different way than our imaginary heroine, but the sentiment is still fitting. Historically there were three bells rung around death; the first being the 'Passing Bell' to warn of impending death, the second the 'Death Knell' at the actual time of the death, and the last was the 'Lych Bell', or 'Corpse Bell', which survives today as the Funeral toll.

Coochow as I me walked: the tune it's based on was also collected by Ravenscroft.

Nightingale - Bateson: Based on Sir Philip Sidney's poem that refers to the myth of Philomela turning into a nightingale after being assaulted, in keeping with the mythical tradition of people being transformed into birds or other beings or objects.

Sweet Suffolk owl: 'Ta-whit ta-whoo' is the contact call of tawny owls, and it is actually made by two birds. The first 'ta-whit' is the female's call followed immediately by the 'ta-whoo' of the male.

Viola da gamba (also called viol)

- Comes in a family of sizes, all held on the legs
- Has six strings and frets like a guitar does
- Is played with a bow held underhand
- Goes with voice, lute, harpsichord, recorder, and other early instruments