

Pills to Purge Melancholy – 6 Remedies to Lift the Spirits

Programme with baroque orchestra (7 pers.) – e.g. Capricornus Consort Basel *or* Ensemble IDEA
(2 violins, viola, violoncello, lute, harpsichord, 2nd recorder)

Music to chase away gloomy thoughts: in Henry Purcell's London, they knew just how to do it. In the theatres of the Restoration era, melancholy and exuberance, nocturnal magic and bawdy humour, laments of love and boisterous dancing existed side by side. From songs, dances, grounds, birdsong and virtuoso divisions emerges a musical theatre in six 'pills' as a remedy to happiness: **Music, Nature, Melancholy, Night, Folly**, **Happiness**. In doing so, Purcell encounters his London contemporaries John Eccles, William Williams and the world of Thomas D'Urfey's famous song collection *Pills to Purge Melancholy*.

PROGRAMME

1st Pill: Music

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)	Overture from "Who Can from Joy Refrain?" (Z.342)
	Prelude (Z. 773)
	Music for a while from "Oedipus" (Z. 583)
	S*trike the Viol* from "Come, ye sons of Art" (Z.323)
	Overture from "Who Can from Joy Refrain?" (Z.342)

2nd Pill: Nature

William Williams (1675-1701)	Adagio, Allegro from "Sonata in Imitation of Birds" (Op. 1 No. 6)
Trad.	The Flowers of the Forest
Anon.	Tune for the Woodlark & Tune for the Sparrow from "The Byrd-Fancyer's Delight"
Henry Purcell	*Hark! How the Songsters* from "Timon of Athens" (Z. 632)
	A Nightingale's Prelude from "The Fairy Queen" (Z. 629)
	Love in their little vein inspires from "Timon of Athens" (Z. 32)
Matthew Locke (ca. 1621-1677)	Curtain Tune from "The Tempest"

3rd Pill: Melancholy

Henry Purcell	*O Let Me Weep* from "The Fairy Queen", (Z. 629)
Purcell/ William Croft (1678-1727)	Ground in c (Z. 221)
Henry Purcell	*Charon the peaceful shade* from "Dioclesian" (Z. 627)
	Frost Scene from "King Arthur" (Z. 628)
	Curtain Tune on a Ground from "Timon of Athens" (Z. 632)
	Hornpipe from "King Arthur" (Z. 628)

INTERVAL

4th Pill: Night

John Eccles (ca. 1668-1735)	The Mad Lover, No. 5 Ayre
Henry Purcell	*Entrance of Night* from "The Fairy Queen" (Z. 629)
	One Charming Night from "The Fairy Queen" (Z. 629)
	Hush, No More from "The Fairy Queen" (Z. 629)
	Dance of the Bacchanals from "Dioclesian" (Z. 627)

5 th Pill: Folly

Henry Purcell	*Now the night is chased away* from "The Fairy Queen" (Z. 629)
	Wisdom and Reason are now out of season from "Dioclesian" (Z. 627)
	I'll sail upon the dogstar from "A Fool's Preferment" (Z. 571)
John Eccles	*My man John had a thing that was long* from "The Catch Club or Merry Companions"
Henry Purcell	*Why should men quarrel?* from "The Indian Queen" (Z. 630)
Trad./ Thomas D'Urfey (1653-1723)	*Johnny cock thy beaver*, from "Pills to Purge Melancholy"
Henry Purcell	A Catch: *`Tis women makes us love* (Z. 281)
Trad.	*John, come kiss me now*

6 th Pill: Happiness

Henry Purcell	Fantazia upon one note (Z. 745)
Trad./ Thomas D'Urfey	Old Simon the King
Henry Purcell	*Hark, the echoing air* from "The Fairy Queen" (Z. 629)
	Sound all your Instruments/ Let all Mankind this Pleasure share from "Dioclesian" (Z. 627)
	The Triumphing Dance from "Dido and Aeneas" (Z. 626)

What helps to chase away melancholy?

In Restoration-era London, one possible answer would have been: music. People sang, played, danced, drank and joked – and turned the shifting states of the soul into theatre in their own right. Thomas D'Urfey's famous collection *Pills to Purge Melancholy* embodies this idea in its very title: songs as a remedy for gloomy thoughts.

Henry Purcell's music belongs squarely within this world. In London's theatres, high art met popular melody, French dance met English song, solemn allegory met bawdy humour. An evening at the theatre could shift within a matter of minutes from deep lament to birdsong, from nocturnal enchantment to exuberant comedy. It is precisely this proximity of apparent opposites that constitutes the special charm of the Restoration stage. Our programme therefore does not attempt to juxtapose a series of individual arias and instrumental pieces. The music is organised into six larger scenes, six remedies for melancholy: music, nature, melancholy, the night, folly and happiness. Within these sections, songs, dances, grounds and instrumental pieces flow into one another as seamlessly as possible. As in the theatre, the form arises not from technical pauses, but from movement, contrast and transformation.

The first 'pill' begins with **Music** itself. Purcell's *Music for a while* immediately promises what this evening sets out to achieve: music can banish the soul's restlessness for a moment. Yet soon the gaze turns outwards. In **Nature**, recorders imitate birds, nightingales respond to one another, and in William Williams' *Sonata in Imitation of Birds*, the observation of nature becomes virtuosity. **Melancholy** itself forms the sombre centrepiece of the first half. Purcell does not suppress it; he gives it space. In *O let me weep*, in the Grounds and in the frost scene from *King Arthur*, grief is savoured, organised and ultimately transformed into beauty.

After the interval comes the **Night**. For Purcell, it is not merely a lack of light, but a poetic state in its own right: still, erotic, mysterious. Yet the night does not last. *Wisdom and Reason are now out of season* and thus begins the fifth remedy: **Folly**. Now the world of London's popular theatre makes an ever-stronger intrusion. Thomas D'Urfey's texts, ambiguous songs, catches and virtuoso divisions transform the concert, for a moment, into a little comedy. Singers and instrumentalists become characters; musical rivalry, vanity, seduction and exuberance are just as much a part of it as the notes themselves.

The final pill is **Happiness**. Here, too, happiness is not an abstract state. It arises from making music together. A simple tune can transform into virtuoso divisions; a call such as *Sound all your instruments* suddenly sets the whole ensemble in motion. A single voice becomes sound; sound becomes shared pleasure. After all, as Purcell puts it: *Let all mankind this pleasure share*.

Perhaps this is where the true effect of this musical remedy lies. It does not dispel melancholy by denying it. It counters it with something else: nature, night, nonsense, beauty, movement – and, above all, the pleasure of sharing music with one another.

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