

Notes on the program

Back in 2002 we were engaged for a noonday concert that happened to fall on October 31: an irresistible opportunity to explore the macabre and supernatural in song. We found a wealth of material, which we complemented with instrumentals torn ruthlessly out of context for the sake of excellent titles like “The Ghost,” “His Rest,” and “Maggott.”

First, a sort of gathering of the clan in Purcell’s “Ye gentle Spirits of the air.” Our eccentric title song, “Wake all the dead, what ho! What ho!”, carries a message of unmistakable import from a time when the cultural oppressions of the Commonwealth were matters of recent and bitter memory.

“O Death rock me asleep” was said to have been written by Anne Boleyn as she awaited execution. This song’s haunting ground returns later in the program, as resurrected by Purcell for use in his paeon to the Moon, the “Glittering Queen of Night.” We also dip briefly into the 16th-century *frottola* repertoire for a couple of interesting meditations on love and death.

In our last set, Purcell warns us to avoid demons and stay on the path in “Hither this way.” The graceful 17th-century witches from *Macbeth* come in for a bit of revelry after dispatching Duncan; and for a finish, we pay a visit to Charon at his appointed task, ferrying departed souls across the Styx to their new home in Hades. All passengers are welcome to board at this time.

– *M. Young*