



## ***Homage to Four Monarchs***

- Pre-concert: Winds chamber music in foyer
- Purcell:** "Welcome, Vicegerent" (1677) for Charles II (his first ever ode)  
"Ye Tuneful Muses" (1686) for James II
- Interval: Keyboard suite in the auditorium, String chamber music in foyer
- Purcell:** "Celebrate this Festival" (1693) for Mary  
**Handel:** "Eternal Source of Light Divine" (1713) for Anne
- Post-concert: Lute songs in foyer

Over the centuries, those that could afford to, have "removed" from the closeness and stench of summer London to far more pleasant surroundings in the country. The monarch's return to the capital in the autumn (or after any other significant absence) was generally celebrated both at court – a banquet, ball and a musical Welcome Ode extolling the ruler's supposed virtues were usual – as well as in the city, where " ... *at night there were ringing of bells, and bonfires in severall places, and other publick expressions of joy.*" Royal birthdays were naturally also an event requiring much celebration, and occasioned yet another poem dripping with obsequious adoration, to be set to lively and colourful music.

The Ode form, firmly established by John Blow and Henry Purcell in the first 20 years after the Restoration, links many of the musical elements of the pre-Commonwealth Masque to the early 18th-century Oratorio. Its varied mix of an overture, followed by solo and ensemble songs and declamations, small-scale choruses and instrumental ritornelli allowed court composers to display the full range of their skills – an opportunity Purcell, in particular, gratefully exploited to wonderful effect in his 16(!) royal odes.

Due to their limited and repetitive function, the texts of these works are often second-rate poetry, but they revealingly reflect the curious political concerns of the moment – whether at court, within the church hierarchy, or in international relations – and comically display the endless, gratuitous fawning so characteristic of the period, and so often ridiculous to modern ears. Ironically, it only served to heighten the expressive and illustrative potential of the words, and afforded composers ample opportunity to clothe the text in music of soaring beauty:

*"... For where the Author's scanty words have failed, your happier  
Graces, Purcell, have prevailed ..."*

Handel's only royal ode was written for Queen Anne, but she never heard it: in both 1713 and 1714 she was too stricken with terminal gout (despite the hopeful references to health in the text!) for the performances to ever go ahead. Often presented with a large choir more suited to oratorio, the choral writing is quite intimate, belonging more to the 8-voice ode tradition of Blow, Purcell and Croft.

**Largely neglected for over 300 years, these gems of the English high Baroque richly deserve a place in the mainstream early-music repertoire. Employing the appropriate musical forces, supported by a sound musicological framework that restores the works to their original cultural context and soundworld, Restoration Company brings back to life this ravishing music in a stylish and refined presentation.**

**SSAATTBB, 4 strings, 5 winds, 2 continuo**