



What Hope for us Remains now He is Gone?

Restoration Memorial Elegies and Georgian Charity Anthems

It was the custom among the literary and musical classes in (post-)Restoration England to acknowledge the life – and mourn the death – of royalty, and their professional peers by singing their praises with a poetic Ode set to dramatic music. Usually based on classical or pastoral themes, they could range from a relatively short, through-composed declamation for voice and continuo, through a chamber setting for a few voices and instruments, to a large-scale composition for soloists, chamber-choir and extensive orchestra. King Charles II and Queen Mary were both the subject of several small-scale memorial elegies by Purcell, but the colleague-composers naturally also set death odes for each other (Purcell for Matthew Locke; John Blow and Jeremiah Clarke for Purcell etc) and these were often the most heartfelt and musically extravagant examples of the form: a lasting musical testament from one musician to another.

Fifty years later, it had become the fashion among the wealthy leading citizens of Britain to leave their own mark on history through the establishment of charitable institutions as a social net for the poor, abandoned and exploited before the days of state-led welfare. An important element to their work – or the continuation of their good name if founded posthumously as part of their own *Last Will and Testament* – was the annual raising of funds through benefit concerts. William Boyce – only Handel was held in higher esteem – wrote his “*Charity Anthem*” for a benefit concert in aid of Mercer’s Hospital in Dublin, named after Mary Mercer who had established it at her death in 1734. Handel’s *Messiah*, too, was first performed in aid of Mercer’s Hospital and two other Dublin institutions, and his later charitable association with London’s first orphanage, which began with the famous “Foundling Hospital” anthem, was an annual feature of the last decade of his life. Both these great men of Georgian music chose the most appropriate psalm text for their compositions: “*Blessed are they that considereth the poor*”.

Aside from the limited number of extant burial services and funeral anthems, 17th- and 18th-century Britain joined music, poetry and death together in two unique ways: first as private flights of pure literary and musical fancy, later as well-grounded vehicles for practical public good. Both are moving expressions of musical testament, at once personal and social.

Purcell:	<i>What Hope for us Remains now He is Gone?</i> [Elegy on the death of Matthew Locke, 1677]
	<i>The Queen’s Epicedium</i> [Three funeral elegies for Queen Mary, 1694]
John Blow:	<i>No, Lesbia, No, you ask in Vain</i>
Purcell:	<i>Incassum, Lesbia</i> <i>O Dive Custos</i>
John Blow:	<i>Mark how the Lark and Linnet Sing</i> [Ode on the Death of Henry Purcell, 1695]
Jeremiah Clarke:	<i>Come, Come Along for a Dance and a Song</i> [Ode on the Death of Henry Purcell, 1695]

William Boyce:	<i>Blessed are They that Considereth the Poor</i> [For the benefit of Mercer’s Hospital, 1741]
Handel:	<i>Blessed are They that Considereth the Poor</i> [‘Foundling Hospital Anthem’, 1749]

Forces: 18-voice choir, 12 strings, 7 winds, 2 continuo