

IMO

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Art Song by Imogen Holst

Joanna Songi soprano
Matthew Fletcher piano



FOREWORD

It is with immense pride that CRD Records presents this dedicated exploration into the vocal works of Imogen Holst (1907–1984). For over 50 years, our label has been defined by a restless curiosity in the wide-ranging field of classical music. A commitment to championing the 'hitherto neglected' and bringing newly discovered or long-overlooked gems to listeners. This release embodies the very heart of that mission.

Whilst the name Holst is a cornerstone of British music, Imogen's own creative voice was often eclipsed by her tireless advocacy for others, setting aside her pen for the sake of the wider musical community. Yet, as these recordings reveal, when she did

turn to composition, the results were of a startlingly high quality—taut, emotionally complex, and capable of bridging the past and present.

By bringing these works to life, we continue our half-century tradition of enriching the recorded archive with voices that deserve to be heard. We hope this album serves not just as a historical document, but as a living testament to the extraordinary legacy of past women composers which is only now starting to attract due appreciation.

Emma Pouncefort
Tom Pouncefort

Directors



Imogen Holst
Image courtesy of the Holst Foundation

IMOGEN HOLST (1907-1984)

Imogen Holst's impact on the musical world was much broader than her compositional output. From setting up the music school at Dartington, to being Co-Artistic Director of the Aldeburgh Festival. From working to promote the music of her father, Gustav Holst, to working as amanuensis for Benjamin Britten. From rediscovering baroque gems and writing authoritative books, to encouraging new generations of composers and musicians; she contributed so much to the musical world we know and love today. Due to her widespread musical commitments, there is not a vast quantity of music written by Imogen Holst. However, the quality of the works in her archive are remarkable and I am delighted to share a selection of these with you.

The *Four Songs* were written in 1944 during Imogen Holst's time at Dartington, after a period of nomadic existence touring with CEMA (Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts) – taking music to communities across England, from Oxfordshire to the Scilly Isles. As Christopher Grogan and Rosamund Strode document: 'One of the most beneficial effects of her early years there [at Dartington] was the opportunity that the atmosphere of peace and solitude gave her to embark once again on her stalled career as a serious composer.'

In the opening song, *Brittle Beauty*, we are introduced to the 'brittle' motif in the piano's opening phrase. It continually punctuates the poetry, as if the singer is occasionally drawn to beauty, and the thorn of the 'brittle' motif reminds the singer

of all the reasons that they should avoid this seduction.

In the second song, *Why Fearest Thou thy Outward Foe*, the 'brittle' fifths are transformed into a rocking stillness as the poetry explores the nature of inner 'hurt' being more pressing than the threat of 'outward harm'. The structure of this piece perhaps represents the 'canker' itself; the calm consonant rocking of the outer parts set against the inner rolling piano part upon which the vocal line cannot settle comfortably.

Shall I Thus Ever Long is a short scena exploring the inner turmoil of a woman waiting for her partner to return after a sea voyage. The bubbling waves of anxiety roiling in the piano part contrasts starkly with the bare, barren texture where

the character contemplates the emptiness of potentially being 'forsaken'.

The final song of the cycle, *As Lawrell Leaves*, presents us with the opposite – or perhaps answer – to the third piece. A song all about the strength of a relationship, Holst's setting suggests this steadfastness is not taken lightly, but is a commitment to enduring the hardships of life together. The sparse open fifths of the right hand with the rolling semitone of the left hand leaves us with a closeness, perhaps, but not a comfortable one.

The first phrase of the song cycle presents us with an open fifth, and upward reach of a tone, whilst the final bars contain an upward fifth answered by a final descending

semitone. We have a wonderful sense of a book being open and closed – the expectation of love reaching its fulfillment in an intimate, but perhaps stifling, bond. Despite the text being published in 1557 and the music written in 1944, these universal human themes reach across the ages, still wholly compelling.

Following this are the three settings of Walter de la Mare (1925): **Three Songs**. Originally written for performance by a treble, the songs are scored with two violins and a cello. They are the earliest of Imogen Holst's works we chose for this release and were written shortly after she finished at St Paul's Girls' School, and before commencing her studies at the Royal College of Music, during a summer she spent playing for folk dance rehearsals in Cambridge.

The maturity of these early compositions is remarkable. This was a period of her life when Imogen Holst was deeply interested in and writing her own poetry. The sensitivity to the text in these settings, and the word painting of the 'leaning willow', 'driving snow', and 'blasts of the void wind' in *The Willow* give a fierce gestural quality to her interpretation of the images. In *The Fool's Song* you can feel the influence of the folk music which Imogen Holst had been immersed in over the summer. Again, the music is used with much imagination to elevate the poetry; creating a cohesion whilst amplifying the distance between the different images presented.

The final piece *Exile* holds, perhaps, the 'misty sea of melancholia' in which Imogen Host described herself as 'splashing about rather

ineffectively' whilst writing these settings. The opening song *The Willow* has a fragment of melody passed between the instruments and voice in dialogue. In contrast, this final piece presents a sense of isolation and loneliness, with a single questioning melodic line hovering over held chords, which, at the end of the piece, ultimately leave the voice in complete solitude for a bar; suspended as a 'stranger' with only the 'memory' of what once was.

Then we come to the final section of this album – a selection of Imogen Holst's **Appalachian Folk Songs** (1938). Holst was indebted to what she described as the 'revolutionary' work of Cecil Sharp. She was keen to preserve simplicity in her arrangements and spoke in a lecture to EFDSS (English Folk Dance and Song Society) in 1935 of

the 'appalling mistake of trying to fit folk tunes into Wagner harmonies'. You will have to forgive my rather unacademic method of selecting these; I chose the pieces which struck me, whose stories I most enjoyed imagining. There is a wealth of folk music that Imogen Holst set – much for it for two or more voices. So, I have had to be rather ruthless by just choosing this small corner to devote to it. In these arrangements we can feel how intimately Imogen Holst understood this genre – the imaginative piano writing supporting and elucidating the folk melodies. From the rumbustious story telling of *The Lady and the Dragoon* to the softly undulating *My Dearest Dear*, you can hear Imogen Holst's affinity and love for this music.

This release presents the first recording of Imogen Holst's **Three Songs** of Walter de la Mare and her **Appalachian Folk Songs**, and the first soprano recording of her **Four Songs**. It has been a privilege to get to know these wonderful works, and I am delighted to share them with you. Imogen Holst clearly believed in the importance of making music accessible to everybody and worked tirelessly throughout her life with that aim. It is my hope that, in bringing these works to the wider audience they deserve, people can continue to come together to enjoy her wonderful music.

Joanna Songi, 2026



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BIOGRAPHIES

Joanna Songi

Described as 'an impressive young talent' by *Opera Journal* and praised for having 'both vocal beauty and bite' by *The Observer*, Joanna has a performing career that has encompassed opera, oratorio, theatre and recital. She performed in Shakespeare's *Henry V* at the Donmar Warehouse (2022), which was broadcast on NT Live. She has performed as a soloist with world-class ensembles, including the Dunedin Consort, The English Concert and Wild Arts at venues including Wigmore Hall, King's Place, St Martin-in-the-Fields, Sinfonia Smith Square, and The Usher Hall.

She was awarded first place in the Dean & Chadlington Singing Competition (2019) and the Brooks-

Van der Pump English Song Competition (2013). She has performed song cycles with the Chroma Ensemble and the United Strings of Europe, and has performed with companies including Glyndebourne, Garsington, West Green and Opera de Tenerife.

Joanna studied music at Cambridge University and completed a postgraduate course at the Royal College of Music. She was a Britten-Pears Young Artist, a Making Music Philip & Dorothy Green Young Concert Artist, and an Opera Prelude Young Artist. An advocate of historical and contemporary women composers, this release presents the second exploration of unrecorded art song; the first – *The Garland – Art Song by Elizabeth Maconchy* – is available to stream and download.

Matthew Fletcher

A member of Glyndebourne Opera Festival's music staff since 2012, and winner of the Das Lied and Kathleen Ferrier accompanist prizes, Matthew is a sought-after pianist and répétiteur. His performances have taken him to major concert halls, festivals and opera houses across the UK and Europe. He has played with the London Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic, BBC Philharmonic Orchestras, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and the Chamber Orchestra of Europe.

Matthew read music at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, where he was organ scholar. He then studied piano accompaniment with Michael Dussek and Pascal

Nemirovsky at the Royal Academy of Music. He was made an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music in 2016, and was on their teaching staff as a vocal coach between 2015 and 2022. Matthew is also a keen jazz pianist and composer.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people without whom this recording would not exist, and I am so thankful for all their support throughout this process.

To Matthew Fletcher www.matthewfletcherpiano.com for his beautiful playing and being the best duo partner one could ever hope for.

To Julian Azkoul www.julianazkoul.com, www.unitedstringseurope.com, Ellie Fagg www.elliefagg.com, and Brian O'Kane for their beautiful playing on the Walter de la Mare settings.

To the Vaughan Williams Foundation and the Francis Routh Trust who have both generously supported this project.

To Myles Eastwood at Eastwood Records, and Emma Pouncefort at CRD Records for all their work in creating this recording. To Jesus College Chapel, Cambridge, and Cambridge Pianoforte.

To Colin Matthews for all his help and support in creating this recording, and to the wonderful archivists at the Red House in Aldeburgh.

To John Hainsworth for creating the beautiful artwork on the front cover mergers.potions.intervene. www.johnhainsworthartist.com

To the writers who have covered Imogen Holst's life and work, including Christopher Grogan, Rosamund Strode and Christopher Tinker.

Lastly, to my wonderful family and friends for all your patience, support and ideas.

Texts and Translations

Three Songs Settings of Walter de la Mare

*Included with thanks to The Literary Trustees of
Walter de la Mare and the Society of Authors*

The Willow

Leans now the fair willow, dreaming
Amid her locks of green.
In the driving snow she was parch'd and cold
And in midnight hath been
Swept by the blasts of the void wind,
Lash'd by the rains.
Now of that wintry dark and bleak
No memory remains.

In mute desire she sways softly
Thrilling sap up-flows,
She praises God in her beauty and grace
Whispers delight. And there flows
A delicate wind from the Southern seas,
Kissing her leaves. She sighs.
While the birds in her tresses make merry,
Burns the sun in the skies.

The Fool's Song

Never, no never listen too long
To the chattering wind in the willows, the night-
bird's song.

'Tis sad, in sooth to lie under the grass,
But none too glad some to wake and grow cold
where life's shadows pass.

Dumb the old Toll-Woman squats,
And for every green copper battered and worn,
doles out Nevers and Nots.

I know a Blind Man, too,
Who with a sharp ear listens and listens the
whole world through.

Oh, sit we snug 'to our feast
With platter and finger and spoon – and good
virtuals at least.

*"The word 'to' is changed to 'at' in Imogen Holst's
score. For the recording, we decided to follow
Holst's score rather than the original poem.*

Exile

Had the gods loved me I had lain
Where darnel is, and thorn,
And the wild night-bird's night-long strain
Trembles in boughs forlorn.

Nay, but they loved me not; and I
Must needs a stranger be,
Whose every exiled day gone by
Aches with their memory.

Four Songs – Settings of poems printed in Tottel's Miscellany (1557)

I. Brittle Beauty

Brittle beauty that nature made so frail,
Whereof the gift is small and short the
season,
Flow'ring today, tomorrow apt to fail,
Tickle treasure abhor'd of reason,
Dangerous to deal with, vain, of none avail,
Costly in keeping past not worth two peason,
Slipper in sliding as in an eles tail,
Hard to attain, once gotten not geason,
Jewel of jeopardie that peril doth assail,
False and untrue, enticed oft to treason,
En'my to youth, that most may I bewail,
Ah bitter sweet, infecting as the poison:
Thou fairest as fruit that with the frost is
taken,
Today ready ripe, tomorrow all to shaken.

II. Why Fearest Thou Thy Outward Foe

Why Fearest Thou thy Outward Foe, when thou
thyself thy harme does feed,
Of grief or hurt, of pain, or woe,
Within each thing is sown a seed.
So fine was never yet the cloth,
No smith so hard his iron did beat,
But the one consumed was with moth,
The other with canker all to fret.
The knotty oak and wainscot old, within doth
eat the silly worm:
Ev'n so a mind in envy roll'd always within itself
doth burn.
Thus ev'rything that nature wrought,
Within itself his hurt doth bear: no outward harm
need to be sought where enemies be within so
near.

III. Shall I Thus Ever Long

Shall I thus ever long and be no whit the
nearer?
And shall I still complain to thee, the which me
will not hear?
Alas! Say nay, say nay, and be no more so
dumb,
But open thou thy manly mouth, and say that
thou wilt come,
Whereby my heart may think although I see not
thee,
That thou wilt come, thy word so sware, if thou
a live man be.
The roaring hugy waves, they threaten my poor
ghost,
And toss thee up and down the seas, in danger
to be lost.
Shall they not make me fear that they have
swallow'd thee,
But as thou art most sure alive
So wilt thou come to me.
Whereby I shall go see thy ship ride on the
strand,
And think and say, "lo where he comes, and
sure here will he land!"

And then I shall lift up to thee my little hand,
And thou shall think thy heart in ease, in health
to see me stand.
And if thou come indeed, as Christ thee send
to do,
Those arms which miss thee now shall then
embrace thee too.
Each vein to ev'ry joint the lively blood shall
spread,
Which now for want of thy glad sight doth show
full pale and dead.
But if thou slip thy troth and do not come at
all,
As minutes in the clock do strike so call for
death I shall.
To please both thy false heart and rid myself
from woe
That rather had to die in troth then live forsaken
so.

IV. As Lawrell Leaves

As lawrell leaves that cease not to be green
From parching sun, nor yet from winter's
threat:
As harden'd oak that fear'th no sword so
keen,
As flint for tool in twain that will not fret.
As fast as rock or pillar surely set
So fast am I to you
And aye have been,
Assuredly whom I cannot forget,
For joy, for pain, for torment nor for tene.
For loss, for gain, for frowning nor for threat.
Bot ever one, yea, both in calm and blast, your
faithful friend,
And will be to my last.

A selection of the Ten Appalachian Folk Songs

No. 8 The Irish Girl

As I walked out one evening
Down by the river side,
I looked all around me,
And an Irish girl I spied.

Her cheeks were red and rosy,
Black and curly was her hair,
How costly was the jewel
That the Irish girl did wear.

Yes, as I walk'd out that evening,
My true love passing by
I knew her mind was changing
By the movements of her eyes.

By the movements of her eyes, my love,
By the movements of her eyes,
I knew my love was changing
By the movement of her eyes.

O don't you remember, love,
When you gave me your right hand,
And vow'd if you got married,
That I should be the man.

I wish I was in London,
Or in some seaport town,
I'd set my foot on watership
And sail the ocean round.

While sailing on the deep, my love,
While sailing on the deep,
I would think of handsome Mary
Just as I go to sleep.

No. 3 I Must and I Will Get Married

One morning, one morning, the weather being
fair,
The mother and the daughter walk'd out to take
the air;
And as they were a-walking this maid began
to vow:
I must and I will get married, I'm in the notion
now.

O daughter, o daughter, 'tis hold your foolish
tongue:

What makes you want to marry?

You know you are too young.

I'm sixteen now, dear mother, and that you must
allow.

I must and I will get married, I'm in the notion
now.

Suppose you were to try dear and could not
find a man?

Oh never mind dear mother, for there is miller
Sam.

He calls me milk and honey, goes milking of
my cow.

I must and I will get married, I'm in the notion
now.

Suppose he were to fool you, as he has done
before.

Oh never mind, dear mother, for there are
plenty more.

For there is Jack the farmer, goes whistling to
his plough.

I must and I will get married, I'm in the notion
now.

No. 9 The Chickens They are Crowing

The chickens they are crowing, a-crowing,
a-crowing.
The chickens they are crowing for it is almost
daylight.

My mother she will scold me, will scold me, will
scold me.
My mother she will scold me, for staying away
all night.

My father he'll uphold me, uphold me, uphold
me.
My father he'll uphold me, and say I've a-done
just right.

I won't go home till morning, till morning, till
morning,
I won't go home till morning, I'll stay with the
girls all night.

The chickens they are crowing, a-crowing,
a-crowing,
The chickens they are crowing for it is almost
daylight.

No. 5 The Brisk Young Lover

There was a young man who courted me,
He stole my heart away from me;
He stole it away with a free good will.
Wherever he goes I love him still.

There is a house in this same town,
He often goes there and sits him down;
He'll take a strange girl upon his knee,
And he'll tell her things that he won't tell me.

It troubles me so, I'll tell you for why,
Because she has more gold than I,
But gold will melt and silver will fly,
But mine is love that will never die.

Must I go bound, must I go free,
Must I love a young man that won't love me?
O no, o no – that never can be
Till apples grown on an orange tree.

Go dig my grave both wide and deep,
Put a marble stone at my head and feet,
And o'er my grave a little dove
To prove to the world that I died for love.

No. 6 Married and Single life

Come all you young people and listen to me,
I'm going to tell you my sad destiny.
If you go to get married, don't hasten it on,
And don't you get married till your full twenty-
one.

O when a man's married he ain't his own man;
He must move through the country and live as
he can.
He's lost that sweet apparel, the flower of
life,
For selling his freedom to buy him a wife.
But when a man's single he can live at his
ease,
He can move through the country and do as he
please,
He can move through the country and live at
his will:
Kiss Polly, kiss Betsy, and he is the same still.

Just pour out a bowl boys, we'll drink bumpers
round.
We'll drink to the poorest if they're to be
found:

We'll drink to the single with the greatest
success,
Likewise to the married and wish them no
less.

No. 2 Fair Sally

A young Irish lady from London she came,
A beautiful creature, fair Sally by name.
Her riches were more than the king did
possess.
Her beauty was more than her wealth at the
best.

There was a young squire who lived right
near,
A courting this lady to make her his dear.
But she was so wealthy, so lofty and high
That on this young man she would scarce cast
an eye.

O Sally, o Sally, o Sally said he
I fear that your beauty my ruin will be
Unless that your hatred is turned into love
I fear that your beauty my ruin will prove.

Nor hatred for you, Sir, nor any other man.
But to say that I love you is more than I can.
So quit your intentions and mend your
discourse,
For I never will wed you unless I am forced.

Before six weeks had scarce come and
passed
This beautiful creature lay sick at the last
She sent for this young man she once did
deny.
She was pieced to the heart and she knew not
for why.

He came to her softly, walked to her bedside
Saying: Have you a pain in your head or your
side?
O no, Sir, dear young man, the night's you've not
guessed,
The pain is a-piercing all in my left breast.

O Sally, o Sally, o Sally, said he,
O don't you remember how you once slighted
me?

I courted for love, you slighted with scorn
And now I'll reward you for what you have
done.

For what's passed and done Sir, I hope you'll
forgive,
And grant me some longer in this wide world
to live.
That I'll ne'er do Sally, while I do draw breath,
But I'll dance on your grave when you're laid in
the earth.

Then off of her fingers pulled diamond rings
three
Saying: wear these for my sake when you're
dancing on me.
I freely forgive you although you won't me.
Ten thousand times over my folly I see.

No. 7 My Dearest Dear

My dearest dear, the time draws near
When I and you must part,
And no-one knows the inner griefs
Of my poor aching heart.
Just see what I suffer for your sake'
You are who I love so dear,
I'd rather I could go with you or you could tarry
here.

I wish your breast was made of glass,
All in it I might behold,
Your name in secret I would write
In letters of bright gold.
Your name in secret I would write,
Pray believe in what I say,
You are the man that I love best
Unto my dying day.

But when you are on some distant shore,
Think on your absent friend,
And when the wind blows high and clear,
A line or two pray send.
And when the wind blows high and clear,
Pray send it, love, to me,

That I may know by your own handwriting
How times has went with thee.

**This line of the piece was left blank in Imogen
Holst's score - I have reconstructed it based on
various iterations of the text and the shape of her
blank melody.*

No. 1 The Lady and the Dragoon

There was a little soldier just lately come from war;
He courted a rich lady who'd money and great store.
Her riches were so great they scarcely could be told,
But yet she loved the soldier because he was so bold.

She says: My little soldier, I would freely be your wife,
But I know my cruel old father would surely end your life.
He drew his sword and pistol and hung them by his side,
And swore he would get married and let what would betide.

And when they had got married and returning home again
Out slipped her cruel old father and seven armed men,
Saying: Since you are determined to be the soldier's wife,

Down in some lonesome valley I'll shortly take his life.

O says the little soldier, I have no time to tattle.
I'm here all in this world and in no fix for battle.
So he drew his sword and pistol and caused them to rattle.
And the lady held the horse while the soldier fought the battle.

The first one he came to he ran him through the main,
The second one he came to, he severed him the same.
Let's run, said the others, I see we'll all be slain:
To fight the valiant soldier, I see 'tis all in vain.

Up steps her cruel old father, a-speaking mighty bold:
O you shall have my daughter and a thousand pound of gold.
Fight on, says the lady, the pile it is too small.
O stop, says the old man, and you shall have it all.

Also from CRD

CRD 3562

The Garland: Art Song by Elizabeth Maconchy Joanna Songi, Matthew Fletcher

'Joanna Songi brings a finely coloured voice and lively textual engagement to this music, allied with flawless intonation... her profound empathy and passion for this music shines throughout... Pianist Matthew Fletcher also provides beautifully traced accompaniment, wonderfully delicate in *There is a Lady Sweet and Kind*'.
Natasha Loges, BBC Music Magazine



CRD 3473

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Three Songs (words: Walter de la Mare) 1925*

No. 1	The Willow	3:05
No. 2	The Fool's Song	1:36
No. 3	Exile	1:46

Four Songs (words: Tottel's Miscellany) 1944

No. 1	Brittle Beauty	1:21
No. 2	Why Fearest Thou Thy Outward Foe	2:03
No. 3	Shall I Thus Ever Long	2:18
No. 4	As Lawrell Leaves	1:39

Ten Appalachian Folk Songs (A selection) 1938*

No. 8	The Irish Girl	2:44
No. 3	I Must and I Will Get Married	1:30
No. 9	The Chickens They are Crowing	1:40
No. 5	The Brisk Young Lover	3:19
No. 6	Married and Single Life	1:17
No. 2	Fair Sally	4:45
No. 7	My Dearest Dear	3:04
No. 1	The Lady and the Dragoon	2:25

**world premiere recordings*

Artwork mergers.potions.intervene.
Courtesy of John Hainsworth

Executive Producers Emma Pouncefort,
Tom Pouncefort

Recorded Jesus College Chapel, Cambridge,
Tuesday 16 September 2025

Piano Steinway Model D

Recording engineer Myles Eastwood

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