



THE COMPLETE

C.W. Orr

volume 2

SONGBOOK

MARK STONE
SIMON LEPPER



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CHARLES WILFRED ORR (1893-1976)

FIVE SONGS FROM "A SHROPSHIRE LAD" (*Alfred Edward Housman*)

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FOUR SONGS

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59'52

MARK STONE *baritone*
SIMON LEPPER *piano*

CHARLES WILFRED ORR

The unsung hero of English song

Part two: Compose at leisure, repent in Painswick

By 1919, at the age of 26, C.W. Orr had studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and received encouragement and guidance from an English composer whom he greatly admired – Frederick Delius. It was also in this year that he first encountered the poetry of A.E. Housman, on hearing Graham Peel's setting of *In summertime on Bredon*. The effect of this was profound, no doubt strengthened by the words of the music critic Ernest Newman, who called for an English song-writer to do for Housman what Hugo Wolf did for Mörike, Goethe and Eichendorf. In fact, of Orr's final tally of 36 songs for solo voice, 24 are Housman settings.

Over the next four years, Orr and his mother wintered in Menton in the South of France, the warmer climate helping with his eczema. Thanks to an obliging neighbour with a piano, he was able to continue working there, and during this period he composed the earliest of his surviving songs. It was another Delius devotee, Philip Heseltine, who was responsible for their publication, arranging for printing in Austria and publication in England on a royalty basis. Further songs were sent to Heseltine, who suggested which were of an appropriate standard and again arranged for their publication. In addition, he also publicised Orr in the November 1925 issue of his periodical, *The Chesterian*.

The next year, Orr suffered a blow, when his devoted mother died. He had lost a source of great encouragement, and his health suffered as a result – he was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Orr was now living at the Kingscourt Hotel in London, and when he recovered he was able to enjoy the city's musical life, promote performances of his songs and contribute occasional articles to the *Daily telegraph*, the *Observer* and the *Musical times*. He became great friends with another Kingscourt Hotel resident, a lawyer and amateur baritone by the name of Richard Lynex. They took Sunday walks together, attended concerts and discussed music, and their friendship continued after they were both married, with the two couples holidaying together and continuing to visit each other's homes until old age made it impossible.

After his mother's death, Orr had become responsible for her companion, Miss Halliday. She had inherited an allowance from Orr's mother, but the will also stated that "she thought her son would never let Miss Halliday want". So, when Orr became engaged to Helen Tomblin in 1929, Miss Halliday had to be persuaded to go to live with her sister, which led to her feeling quite bitter, despite her allowance being increased by Orr's aunt. Helen's parents were also concerned

about the match, on account of his health. A specialist instructed Helen to marry him as soon as she could, and suggested that they should live in the warmer climate of South Africa; they decided, instead, to set up home in the Cotswold village of Painswick.

With Heseltine's tragically early death in 1930, Orr lost both a great friend and a valued critic of his work. Without Heseltine's help, he struggled to have his next songs published, resorting to financing the publication himself. Throughout the '30s he continued to write slowly, producing a song every couple of years, until the outbreak of war in 1939, which led to a twelve-year break in his composition. They stayed in Painswick for the first two years of the war, with Orr taking on the role of air-raid warden and Helen working for the St John's Ambulance. Wanting to do more, they moved to London, where he became a temporary clerk in the Crown Agents Shipping Department in Whitehall, and wrote music and book reviews for the newly launched *Music review*.

After the war, they returned to Painswick, and from 1946 to 1950 he managed a bookshop in Stroud, about three miles from their home. He returned to composition in 1952, and over the next few years he composed his last six songs and a piece for cello and piano. Unfortunately, as he grew older he became increasingly deaf and was unable to compose anything after 1957, and towards the end of his life, in 1976, his bitterness at his lack of recognition grew more obvious. In his own copy of his last song, he pasted a couple of cuttings, which give an insight into his feelings, as well as providing a thought-provoking postscript to the life of an under-appreciated composer:

“I write little now. It is impossible to compose except under the strong excitement of an assurance of finding sympathy in what you write”

The Letters of Shelley

“Fame... is not only a balm, it is a tonic, and some kind of recognition is essential if an artist is to go on working at all... An artist must have some kind of fame during his lifetime if he is to do his best work”

James Laver's Whistler

THE COMPOSER
CHARLES WILFRED

1893 ORR 1976

LIVED HERE

1934-1976

FIVE SONGS FROM “A SHROPSHIRE LAD”

Alfred Edward Housman (1859-1936)

Two thirds of Orr’s songs are settings of A.E. Housman, and the majority of these are from the poet’s 1896 collection *A Shropshire lad*. Orr returned to Housman’s texts throughout most of his 36-year creative career, but the songs of this group are some of the first he wrote; they were composed in 1924-26 and published separately in 1925 and 1927. Only in 1959, after some revision, were they grouped together for publication as a set of five songs. By this time Orr had finished composing, his last song having been written two years previously, and he took the opportunity to tidy up these early works.

1 i With rue my heart is laden

Written in 1924, this song was dedicated to Mrs Hearne, an elderly acquaintance in the south of France, who allowed Orr to use her Bechstein upright piano during the numerous winters he spent there on account of his delicate health. He sent this song, together with *When I was one-and-twenty*, to Philip Heseltine – the real name of the composer Peter Warlock – for a critical review. Heseltine played through them with the baritone John Goss and was delighted, referring to this piece as “one of the loveliest songs any English composer has written”. He forwarded them to Oxford University Press, who published them both the next year.

With rue my heart is laden
For golden friends I had,
For many a rose-lipt maiden
And many a lightfoot lad.

By brooks too broad for leaping
The lightfoot boys are laid;
The rose-lipt girls are sleeping
In fields where roses fade.

2 ii This time of year

This was one of the later songs of the group, written in 1926 and published the following year. Orr used a Housman text that works as an interesting companion piece to *Is my team ploughing*; they are close together in *A Shropshire lad*, separated by another Orr setting, *Along the field*. In both poems, a man has become the companion of a dead friend's girl, but in this song there is an intriguing contradiction between the regret at the quarrels he had with his friend when he was alive and the strange sense of triumph he now feels at having got the girl.

This time of year a twelvemonth past,
When Fred and I would meet,
We needs must jangle, till at last
We fought and I was beat.

So then the summer fields about,
Till rainy days began,
Rose Harland on her Sundays out
Walked with the better man.

The better man she walks with still,
Though now 'tis not with Fred:
A lad that lives and has his will
Is worth a dozen dead.

Fred keeps the house all kinds of weather,
And clay's the house he keeps;
When Rose and I walk out together
Stock-still lies Fred and sleeps.

3 iii Oh, when I was in love with you

This song, also written in 1926 and published in 1927, is remarkably short by Orr's standards. It is deeply indebted to Ralph Vaughan Williams' 1909 setting of the same poem, and although the later song develops the form a little with occasional changes in time signature, the similarities are striking throughout. It is, of course, difficult to imagine a more elaborate response to such a straightforward poem as this, written to a former lover to demonstrate the wonderful time the author is having since they parted company, although both songs strive to illustrate the amusing uncertainty in the poet's voice.

Oh, when I was in love with you,
Then I was clean and brave,
And miles around the wonder grew
How well did I behave.

And now the fancy passes by,
And nothing will remain,
And miles around they'll say that I
Am quite myself again.

4 iv Is my team ploughing

This is one of Housman's most famous poems, particularly popular amongst composers, with well-known settings already in existence by George Butterworth and Ralph Vaughan Williams at the time of this song's composition in 1925. Orr's rendering of these words produced something quite different, really illustrating his skill at managing to hint at the darkness within

the poem without ruining the sweetness of its structure. The last two verses in other settings can seem twee or even overly dramatic, but Orr manages to avoid this, using the poem to describe the relationship of the two men, something which was perhaps closer to Housman's intention.

"Is my team ploughing,
That I was used to drive
And hear the harness jingle
When I was man alive?"

Ay, the horses trample,
The harness jingles now;
No change though you lie under
The land you used to plough.

"Is football playing
Along the river-shore,
With lads to chase the leather,
Now I stand up no more?"

Ay, the ball is flying,
The lads play heart and soul;
The goal stands up, the keeper
Stands up to keep the goal.

"Is my girl happy,
That I thought hard to leave,
And has she tired of weeping
As she lies down at eve?"

Ay, she lies down lightly,
She lies not down to weep:
Your girl is well contented.
Be still, my lad, and sleep.

"Is my friend hearty,
Now I am thin and pine,
And has he found to sleep in
A better bed than mine?"

Yes, lad, I lie easy,
I lie as lads would choose;
I cheer a dead man's sweetheart,
Never ask me whose.

5 v On your midnight pallet lying

This is a lover's plea to his beloved for a final night together before he must depart, with the second verse, and its allusions to the poet's imminent death, suggesting he is about to leave for war. Orr's song, written in 1925, captures both the seductive voice of the lover and the sense of foreboding as he prepares to join his comrades. It is a suitably final item to close the group, and once more shows Orr enjoying the themes of war and the sacrifice of youth, whilst getting to the heart of the dichotomy inherent in most of Housman's verse.

On your midnight pallet lying,
Listen, and undo the door:
Lads that waste the light in sighing
In the dark should sigh no more;
Night should ease a lover's sorrow;
Therefore, since I go to-morrow,
Pity me before.

In the land to which I travel,
The far dwelling, let me say –
Once, if here the couch is gravel,
In a kinder bed I lay,
And the breast the darning smother
Rested once upon another's
When it was not clay.

6 Plucking the rushes

Arthur Waley (1889-1966) after *Anonymous (4th century)*

Around the time of this song's composition, in 1921, Chinese poetry was very much in vogue with English composers. This text is from the 1918 collection *170 Chinese poems*, translated by Arthur Waley, a renowned orientalist, who taught himself Chinese and Japanese whilst working at the British Museum as Assistant Keeper of Oriental Prints and Manuscripts. Philip Heseltine arranged for the song's publication, having it engraved and printed in Austria, to take advantage of the favourable exchange rates, and then negotiating a royalty-based deal with Chesters. It is Orr's earliest surviving song, and describes a couple distracted from their task of collecting rushes.

Green rushes with red shoots,
Long leaves bending to the wind –
You and I in the same boat
Plucking rushes by the Five Lakes.
We started at dawn from the orchid-island:
We rested under the elms till noon.
You and I plucking rushes
Had not plucked a handful when night came!

FOUR SONGS

This collection of songs was published in 1959, as was *Five songs from "A Shropshire lad"*, and, like this Housman group, its publication would appear to be a housekeeping exercise by a composer who was clearing his desk at the end of his career. The first song was written 27 years earlier, although the remaining three were from the '50s. They are all excellent songs, and the consistency of Orr's writing style means that there is no problem including such a span of years in the same collection. It is particularly interesting to hear the different approaches across a variety of non-Housman poets.

7 i **Bahnhofstrasse**

James Joyce (1882-1941)

Joyce suffered his first attack of glaucoma on Zurich's Bahnhofstrasse in 1917, from which time he endured eye pain and failing sight. His reaction is recorded in this poem: the realization that his youth was behind him, but that he had yet to obtain the sagacity of old age. Orr's song was composed in 1932 for publication in *The Joyce book*, settings of the thirteen poems from Joyce's *Pomes Penyeach*, each by a different composer. The intention was that its publication would provide financial aid to Joyce, who was facing poverty in Paris at the time, but Orr's motive was, by his own admission, more for self-promotion.

The eyes that mock me sign the way
Whereto I pass at eve of day.

Grey way whose violet signals are
The trysting and the twining star.

Ah star of evil! star of pain!
Highhearted youth comes not again

Nor old heart's wisdom yet to know
The signs that mock me as I go.

8 ii **Requiem**

Helen Waddell (1889-1965) after Aurelius Prudentius Clemens (348-c.413)

This is one of three settings of poems from Helen Waddell's 1929 book *Medieval Latin lyrics*, two of which are translations of the Roman Christian poet Prudentius. The words of this song are better known today from Herbert Howells' 1963 setting, written in memory of John F. Kennedy. Orr omits five of Waddell's nine verses, skipping some of the more overtly religious references, which may have jarred with the ungodly composer's sensibilities, although, writing this song in 1954, he must have had an acute awareness of his own mortality. It is dedicated to the composer Christopher Le Fleming.

Take him, earth, for cherishing,
To thy tender breast receive him.
Body of a man I bring thee,
Noble even in its ruin.

Guard him well, the dead I give thee,
Not unmindful of His creature
Shall He ask it: He who made it
Symbol of His mystery.

Take, O take him, mighty Leader,
Take again thy servant's soul.
To the house from which he wandered
Exiled, erring, long ago.

But for us, hap earth about him,
Earth with leaves and violets strown,
Grave his name, and pour the fragrant
Balm upon the icy stone.

9 **iii The time of roses****Thomas Hood** (1799-1845)

Composed in 1955, this was Orr's only setting of Hood, a London-based writer who was better known for his humorous works, often concerning contemporary issues. The poem, simply entitled *Ballad*, dates from 1827 and had proved popular with composers, the most notable being Roger Quilter, who set it in 1928. Orr's song, dedicated to the British Council officer and composer Michael Kitchin, is more flowing than Quilter's, and whereas the earlier setting is ambiguous as to the melancholy the poet is expressing, Orr's is decidedly uplifting and optimistic at the memory of the lovers' first meeting.

It was not in the winter
Our loving lot was cast;
It was the time of roses –
We plucked them as we passed!

That churlish season never frowned
On early lovers yet:
O no – the world was newly crowned
With flowers when first we met!

’Twas twilight, and I bade you go,
But still you held me fast;
It was the time of roses –
We plucked them as we passed!

10 **iv Since thou, O fondest and truest****Robert Bridges** (1844-1930)

This was also a one-off setting by Orr. Bridges worked as a doctor until lung disease forced him to retire in 1882, at which point he devoted himself to writing. He was appointed Poet Laureate in 1913, and this poem comes from his 1890 collection *The shorter poems of Robert Bridges*. The song was composed in 1957, and was Orr's final song. It is in stark contrast to his Housman settings and something in the music's broad, sweeping lines has an appropriate air of finality about it, as if the composer is deliberately drawing his work to a close with a flamboyant flourish.

Since thou, O fondest and truest,
Hast loved me best and longest,
And now with trust the strongest
The joy of my heart renewest;

The good I have ne'er repaid thee
In heaven I pray be recorded,
And all thy love rewarded
By God, thy master that made thee.

11 Hymn before sleep

Helen Waddell after Aurelius Prudentius Clemens

Paul Spencer was an amateur baritone and Orr's favourite interpreter of his songs, and so he dedicated this 1953 setting to him; this was his first Waddell-Prudentius song, written a year before *Requiem*. Although Spencer was an amateur singer, Orr was impressed with the endless trouble he took to learn his songs, once remarking that you would "never get that from a professional singer", and in 1950 Spencer gave a recital on the BBC Home Service that included *Silent noon* and *The Isle of Portland*. Orr's wonderfully soporific song was published in Canada due to a lack of interest from the London firms.

The toil of day is ebbing,
The quiet comes again,
In slumber deep relaxing
The limbs of tired men.

And minds with anguish shaken,
And spirits racked with grief,
The cup of all forgetting
Have drunk and found relief.

The still Lethean waters
Now steal through every vein,
And men no more remember
The meaning of their pain...

Let, let the weary body
Lie sunk in slumber deep.
The heart shall still remember
Christ in its very sleep.

12 **While summer on is sleeping**

Helen Waddell after the Benediktbeuern Manuscript (11th-13th centuries)

Also written in 1953, this Waddell translation, like the other two, is taken from her book *Medieval Latin lyrics*. It is a translation from the manuscript discovered at the Bavarian Benediktbeuern monastery in 1803, a document most famous as the textual source for Carl Orff's *Carmina burana*. Although much of Orff's work is based on bawdy sections of the manuscript, this poem is a simple love song, and in fact a great deal of the document contains verses such as this. Orr produced an impassioned setting, which like the previous song was published in Canada in 1954.

While summer on is stealing,
And come the gracious prime,
And Phœbus high in heaven,
And fled the rime.

For love of one young maiden,
My heart hath ta'en its wound,
And manifold the grief that I
In love have found.

Ah, would she but have pity,
And take me to her side,
And stooping lean down o'er me,
And so abide!

13 **The lads in their hundreds**
Alfred Edward Housman

This 1936 composition owes something in its general shape to George Butterworth's earlier setting, but whereas Butterworth's song is almost entirely strophic, Orr's verses develop and end on an almost triumphant note at the final mention of the lads' glorious deaths. The two treatments are reflections not only of the different natures of the composers but also of the fact that Butterworth's was composed three years before World War 1 and Orr's three years before World War 2. Orr dedicated his setting to the tenor Sydney Northcote, who in addition to singing his songs was also the author of the first full length article on the composer.

The lads in their hundreds to Ludlow come in for the fair,
There's men from the barn and the forge and the mill and the fold,
The lads for the girls and the lads for the liquor are there,
And there with the rest are the lads that will never be old.

There's chaps from the town and the field and the till and the cart,
And many to count are the stalwart, and many the brave,
And many the handsome of face and the handsome of heart,
And few that will carry their looks or their truth to the grave.

I wish one could know them, I wish there were tokens to tell
The fortunate fellows that now you can never discern;
And then one could talk with them friendly and wish them farewell
And watch them depart on the way that they will not return.

But now you may stare as you like and there's nothing to scan;
And brushing your elbow unguessed at and not to be told
They carry back bright to the coiner the mintage of man,
The lads that will die in their glory and never be old.

The Isle of Portland

Alfred Edward Housman

The Orr songs that baritone Robert Rowell included in his 1935 Wigmore Hall recital were singled out for particular praise by the critics, and the composer rewarded him with the dedication for this 1938 song, one of his finest compositions. It uses his familiar key shifts and barcarolle rhythmic devices to illustrate the sea's constant presence and the wistful sentiment of the poem, which describes the fate of a friend who died in the prison on the island. Portland prisoners were subjected to penal labour, working in the quarry, and in 1865, for example, the authorities reported one death and 282 accidents on the works.

The star-filled seas are smooth to-night
From France to England strown;
Black towers above the Portland light
The felon-quarried stone.

On yonder island, not to rise,
Never to stir forth free,
Far from his folk a dead lad lies
That once was friends with me.

Lie you easy, dream you light,
And sleep you fast for aye;
And luckier may you find the night
Than ever you found the day.

Alfred Edward Housman

The vast majority of Orr's repertoire was song, but he also wrote a short piece for cello and piano and, most famously, his *Cotswold hill tune* in 1937. This latter piece for string orchestra was written in response to the conductor Eugene Goossens requesting an orchestration of his *Seven songs from "A Shropshire lad"* and has been arranged as a song for the purposes of this recording using the first Housman poem from *A Shropshire lad*. 1887 was the year of Queen Victoria's golden jubilee, and Housman's poem juxtaposes the celebrations alongside descriptions of fallen comrades, although the poet vehemently denied that it was an attack on patriotism.

From Clee to heaven the beacon burns,
The shires have seen it plain,
From north and south the sign returns
And beacons burn again.

Look left, look right, the hills are bright,
The dales are light between,
Because 'tis fifty years to-night
That God has saved the Queen.

Now, when the flame they watch not towers
About the soil they trod,
Lads, we'll remember friends of ours
Who shared the work with God.

To skies that knit their heartstrings right,
To fields that bred them brave,
The saviours come not home to-night:
Themselves they could not save.

It dawns in Asia, tombstones show
And Shropshire names are read;
And the Nile spills his overflow
Beside the Severn's dead.

We pledge in peace by farm and town
The Queen they served in war,
And fire the beacons up and down
The land they perished for.

"God save the Queen" we living sing,
From height to height 'tis heard;
And with the rest your voices ring,
Lads of the Fifty-third.

Oh, God will save her, fear you not:
Be you the men you've been,
Get you the sons your fathers got,
And God will save the Queen.

16 **In valleys green and still**
Alfred Edward Housman

Around the time of World War 2, Orr had a twelve-year break from composition. In 1952, when he resumed, he returned to the familiar ground of Housman, although this setting of a poem from the 1922 collection *Last poems* was to be his last Housman song. It was dedicated to the Canadian musician and scholar P.M.H. Edwards, which may be related to the fact that it was produced by a Canadian publisher when no London firm was interested. The poem's theme of soldiers going off to their deaths at war is similar to many of those from *A Shropshire lad*, and so naturally appealed to Orr.

In valleys green and still
Where lovers wander maying,
They hear from over hill
A music playing.

Behind the drum and fife,
Past hawthorn wood and hollow,
Through earth and out of life,
The soldiers follow.

And down the distance they,
With dying note and swelling,
Walk the resounding way
To the still dwelling.

The soldier's is the trade:
In any wind or weather
He steals the heart of maid
And man together.

The lover and his lass
Beneath the hawthorn lying
Have heard the soldiers pass,
And both are sighing.

THREE SONGS FROM "A SHROPSHIRE LAD"
Alfred Edward Housman

This group of songs, published in 1940, was dedicated to the renowned pianist Gerald Moore. Moore had accompanied the baritone Robert Rowell, himself the dedicatee of *The Isle of Portland*, for his 1935 Wigmore Hall recital, the programme of which had included several of Orr's Housman settings. This dedication suggests that the favourable reception his songs received was a great comfort to the composer. In spite of this encouragement, the three songs of this group were followed by a twelve-year break from composition, as World War 2 brought a considerable change to the Orrs' day-to-day existence.

17 i Into my heart an air that kills

The first song of the group was composed in 1935, with the later-composed *The lads in their hundreds* leapfrogging it for an earlier publication date. This is one of Housman's most famous poems, with its achingly-nostalgic image of the "land of lost content" resonating with soldiers in foreign lands, or indeed anyone away from a place they love. Orr's opening melody suggests the "air" of the first line, and he uses variations of it for the start of the second verse and end of the poem, and for the sentimental repetition of the last line.

Into my heart an air that kills
From yon far country blows:
What are those blue remembered hills,
What spires, what farms are those?

That is the land of lost content,
I see it shining plain,
The happy highways where I went
And cannot come again.

18 ii Westward on the high-hilled plains

This poem follows *With rue my heart is laden* in Housman's collection, and can be viewed as a companion piece; the earlier poem is the voice of the living considering the fallen, whereas this verse is from the point of view of an old man looking at the young, who are now living out similar lives to his. Orr's 1937 setting is steeped with the poet's own yearning for his old life, as well as a mixture of regret and comfort for the young lad, as he suffers the same troubles as the old man.

Westward on the high-hilled plains
Where for me the world began,
Still, I think, in newer veins
Frets the changeless blood of man.

There, when hueless is the west
And the darkness hushes wide,
Where the lad lies down to rest
Stands the troubled dream beside.

Now that other lads than I
Strip to bathe on Severn shore,
They, no help, for all they try,
Tread the mill I trod before.

There, on thoughts that once were mine,
Day looks down the eastern steep,
And the youth at morning shine
Makes the vow he will not keep.

19 **iii Oh see how thick the goldcup flowers**

Orr ends the group with this 1939 composition. The poem's theme is a familiar one for Housman, using the imagery of flowers' brief blooms to illustrate the precious and fleeting nature of time, and the necessity to seize the moment. In this case, the argument is being put forward by the poet to seduce a girl, to which she responds with a single line at the end of each verse. In spite of his persuasive words, which conclude with a quote from Shakespeare's *It was a lover and his lass*, she leaves him at the poem's close.

Oh see how thick the goldcup flowers
Are lying in field and lane,
With dandelions to tell the hours
That never are told again.
Oh may I squire you round the meads
And pick you posies gay?
– 'Twill do no harm to take my arm.
"You may, young man, you may."

Ah, spring was sent for lass and lad,
'Tis now the blood runs gold,
And man and maid had best be glad
Before the world is old.
What flowers to-day may flower to-morrow,
But never as good as new.
– Suppose I wound my arm right round –
" 'Tis true, young man, 'tis true."

Some lads there are, 'tis shame to say,
That only court to thieve,
And once they bear the bloom away
'Tis little enough they leave.
Then keep your heart for men like me
And safe from trustless chaps.
My love is true and all for you.
"Perhaps, young man, perhaps."

Oh, look in my eyes, then, can you doubt?
– Why, 'tis a mile from town.
How green the grass is all about!
We might as well sit down.
– Ah, life, what is it but a flower?
Why must true lovers sigh?
Be kind, have pity, my own, my pretty,
– "Good-bye, young man, good-bye."

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