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## INTRODUCTION

*“Once upon a time, words began to vanish from the language of children. They disappeared so quietly that at first almost no one noticed – fading away like water on stone. The words were those that children used to name the natural world around them: acorn, adder, bluebell, bramble, conker – gone!... The words were becoming lost: no longer vivid in children’s voices, no longer alive in their stories...”*

Thus begins *The Lost Words*, Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris’s beautiful book which contains spell-poems and paintings of common names for everyday nature – from *acorn* to *wren* – which had slipped so far out of the consciousness of children that they were omitted from a new edition of a junior dictionary. Published in 2017, *The Lost Words* summons the magic of nature to help conjure these words back to life:

*“...it holds not poems but spells of many kinds that might just, by the old, strong magic of being spoken aloud, unfold dreams and songs, and summon lost words back into the mouth and the mind’s eye.”*

For this piece, twelve of the poems from the book have been selected and set to music with children’s voices in mind, but the piece may be performed by any group of upper voices. Much of the piece is sung in unison, but the vocal line has frequent divisions into two and three parts. There are brief moments in four vocal parts in *Adder* at bar 43 and in *Otter* at bar 45, and a moment in seven parts for the ‘tree’ cluster in *Conker* at bar 130.

The song texts are printed here as they appear in the original book, hence the use of italics for the different voices in *Conker* and in *Willow*, other instances of punctuation and capitalisation (the poems are all acrostics) and the use of italics for the word ‘flows’ in *Bluebell* at bar 21.

The songs can be performed by themselves, or in selections to suit the performers. The order published here is recommended if all twelve songs are being presented, but performers should feel at liberty to select their own order if they so wish.

James Burton, May 2019

*The Lost Words* was commissioned by the Hallé Concerts Society for the Hallé Children’s Choir, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

The first performance of the version with piano accompaniment took place at the Tanglewood Festival on 21st July 2019 with the Boston Symphony Children’s Choir and Graeme McCullough (piano), conducted by the composer. Selections of the orchestral version were performed on 23rd July 2019 at the Tanglewood Festival with the Boston Symphony Children’s Choir and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, conducted by the composer.

# The Lost Words

Based on *The Lost Words*  
by Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris

to Jackie and Robert

James Burton

## Acorn

**Allegro Agitato** ♩ = 160

Voices

Piano

*mp cresc. poco marcato*

*f* 3

7 *mp poco marcato*

As flake is to bliz-zard, as

*ff dim.* *mp*

14 Curve is to sphere, as knot is to net,

19 *mp* *mf*

as One is to ma - ny, as coin is to mon - ey, as

*mp* *mf*