

Programme Notes By Mark Fitzgerald

Natalie Clein, cello

Julius Drake, piano

Claire Booth, voice

Programme:

Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967)

Sonatina

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

“Öffne dich, mein ganzes Herze”

from Cantata BWV 61

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

arr. Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Five Spiritual Songs (Geistliche Lieder), a selection

1. Gedenke doch, mein Geist; 3. Liebster Herr Jesu; 5. Bist du bei mir; 4. Komm, süsßer Tod

John Cage (1912-1992)

The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs

John Tavener (1944-2013)

Threnos (Lament)

John Tavener (1944-2013)

Akhmatova songs, a selection

3. Boris Pasternak; 4. Couplet; 1. Dante

INTERVAL

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Zwei Gesänge, Op. 91

1. Gestillte Sehnsucht
2. Geistliches Wiegenlied

Deborah Pritchard (b.1977)

Storm Song

(Text by Jeanette Winterson)

Leoš Janáček (1854-1928)

Pohádka (Fairy Tale)

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Auf dem Strom, D. 943

During his tenure as Kapellmeister at the court of Anhalt-Cöthen (1717-1723), Bach penned a set of Six Suites for unaccompanied cello. The world of musicology has yet to find a surviving facsimile of the works in the hand of the composer, however, scholars and performers consider the manuscripts of copyists Johann Peter Kellner (organist and composer) and Bach's second wife, Anna Magdalena, as their most reliable sources. The latter of the pair prepared her copy of the collection between 1727 and 1728 for the Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel chamber musician Georg Heinrich Ludwig Schwanenberger, who had visited Leipzig at the time and taken lessons in thoroughbass from Bach.

Tonight's concert is an exploration of the expressive qualities of three instruments in music ranging from the eighteenth century to the present day. The earliest pieces in the concert are those attributed to Johann Sebastian Bach. 'Öffne dich, mein ganzes Herze' is the penultimate movement of Bach's 1714 cantata for the first Sunday of Advent Nun komm der Heiden Heiland. Originally scored for soprano and continuo, it transfers easily to tonight's forces. The text depicts a Christian's heart opening to receive Christ.

Benjamin Britten made a number of arrangements specifically for the recitals he gave with his partner, tenor Peter Pears, and these realisations of Five Spiritual Songs were first performed by them at a recital in Blythburgh Church during the 1969 Aldeburgh festival. The first and fifth songs were found in the second Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach while the remaining songs were sourced in Georg Christian Schemelli's Musicalisches Gesangbuch. In recent times the authorship of this material has come under question and the most well known of the four songs heard tonight 'Bist du bei mir' has been re-attributed to the composer Gottfried Heinrich Stölzel (1690–1749). The sources provided Britten with the melody line and bass line, with only figured indications for the inner harmonies and Britten's renditions consist of restrained chordal realisations of these implied harmonies. Only in 'Gedenke doch, mein Geist, zurücke,' which contains a number of rests in the vocal line, does Britten create a more independent melodic line for the piano, based on the material from the vocal part.

The two pieces for cello and piano demonstrate the difficulties composers sometimes face in bringing their work to fruition. Zoltán Kodály, who was himself a cellist, composed a three movement cello sonata in 1909–10 but shortly afterwards became dissatisfied with the first movement and withdrew it. Preparing the work for publication in 1922 he composed a new first movement but decided that this did not fit with the earlier piece and so the work was published as a two movement sonata. The discarded movement from 1922 was published posthumously

as the Cello Sonatina. The work has a simple form; after a dramatic piano introduction the cello introduces three ideas. These are then repeated by the cello, at first note for note and later with alterations and transpositions but against a different and more dramatic piano part. A short coda brings the work to a conclusion.

Leoš Janáček's contemporaneous *Pohádka* (Fairy Tale) underwent an even more complex gestation before its publication in 1924. The first version of the work was premiered by fellow teachers Rudolph Pavlata and Ludmilla Prokopová at the Organ School in Brno in 1910 and was inspired by a story by the Russian author Zhukovsky entitled *The Tale of Tsar Berendyey*. The story told of a childless Tsar who during travels around his kingdom entered a bargain to kill the first creature he encountered on his return. This turns out to be a son who has been born in his absence. Janáček seems initially to have concentrated on the first part of the story, an early programme note stating that the three movements depicted the tsar's grief at the childless state of his marriage, his doubt and hope and finally his departure on his journey. In 1912 a fourth movement was added beginning with a lullaby followed by a depiction of the Tsar's horror when he realised how he was expected to fulfil his part of the bargain. A further version of the piece was made in 1913, before the final three-movement revision was completed in 1923. By this time Janáček had decided to drop the programme and referred to it as a sonata. Perhaps only the first movement contains any clear traces of its origins; after a slowly unfolding introduction with a fanfare type figure on the cello, there is an impassioned *andante* followed by a faster dramatic closing section. The second movement is a tender *adagio*, punctuated by a recurring *pizzicato* idea which builds to an almost operatic climax before a quiet conclusion. By contrast the final movement, based on a folk-like melody, is unclouded and relatively slight.

In *Threnos* (Lament) by John Tavener the solo cello is brought close to the soundworld of the human voice. Composed in 1990 for the cellist Steven Isserlis, who had premiered *The Protecting Veil* the previous year, it commemorates the death of a friend. In his programme note the composer stated that the title had 'both liturgical and folk significance in Greece—the *Threnos* of the Mother of God sung at the *Epitaphios* on Good Friday and the *Threnos* of mourning which is chanted over the body of a close friend.' Like all Tavener's work from this period it eschews development and instead rotates short segments of chant-like material.

The remaining pieces on the programme demonstrate approaches to song setting that avoid the traditional format of voice and piano. Commissioned by the singer Janet Fairbank, John

Cage's 'The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs' (1942) sets lines and phrases from page 556 of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, a text which Cage returned to on several occasions, though it seems he never read the complete work. Scored for soprano and closed piano, the singer is asked to perform without vibrato in the manner of a folk singer, while the pianist is required to play a notated rhythm with fingers and knuckles on four points of the piano case: underneath the keyboard, on two parts of the keyboard lid and on the top of the piano. The restriction of the vocal line to three pitches and the way in which the close of the song iterates different names for Isobel gives the work a hypnotic, incantatory feel.

John Tavener's *Akhmatova Songs* for voice and cello was the second composition in which he drew on the work of Russian poet Anna Akhmatova. However, whereas the first, the austere fifty minute *Akhmatova Requiem* (1979–80) set the eponymous cycle of fifteen poems (which Tavener interspersed with prayers from the Russian Orthodox funeral service), this series of short songs draws on a selection of texts drawn from across Akhmatova's career. Tavener was drawn to poems which explored the relationship between the author and audience (as seen in 'Couplet') and her predecessors ranging from the Florentine author of the fourteenth century masterpiece *The Divine Comedy* ('Dante') to her contemporary Boris Pasternak, best known in the west for his controversial novel *Dr Zhivago* but renowned in Russia as a poet and translator of Shakespeare. The songs were premiered in September 1993 by Patricia Rozario and Steven Isserlis and the composer noted that the use of an Indian raga (or melodic mode) as the basis of one of the songs was inspired by Rozario. He also felt that this cycle marked a departure in his work away from the idea of human emotion as a creative force towards a more Platonic idea of a music to be found by the artist after the effects of ego have dissipated.

Deborah Pritchard is currently a composition tutor at the University of Oxford and the Purcell School. Her work has been recorded by NMC, Signum and Nimbus and in 2017 her solo violin composition *Inside Colour* won a British Composer Award. Pritchard is a synaesthetic composer and in interview with *M Magazine* she stated 'the process of composition connects me with not only my sense of humanity, but also with what lies beyond myself. For me, colour illuminates a sense of spirituality: a sensibility which resonates with Kandinsky who said, "colour is a power that directly influences the soul"'.

Storm Song was commissioned by the University of Oxford to mark International Women's Day and sets a new text by Jeanette Winterson. It was premiered by Gillian Keith, Mats

Lidström and Anna Tilbrook in a concert curated by Natalie Clein in Oxford in 2017. The outer sections of the song, marked 'ethereal' in the score, contain a sense of power held in reserve in contrast with the outburst of ferocity at the words 'My voice is the thunder.' The composer states 'When setting Winterson's text I decided not to reveal the storm straight away, rather I suggested its onset in an impressionistic and evocative way like the latent storm you might hear in the distance through closed windows or metaphorically, deep within the soul. For me, the most striking imagery of Winterson's words is the conclusion, where we are asked "what colour is the dawn that holds the storm?" as we "fall without falling to the earth without end" which I show through an undulating succession of triadic chords in the piano against which soprano and cello gently spiral into the horizon.'

Songs by two of the great lieder composers of the nineteenth century, with important obbligato parts, round out tonight's programme. The two songs by Brahms document aspects of the relationship between Brahms, the violinist Joseph Joachim and his wife the singer Amalie Schneeweiss. 'Gesitliches Wiegenlied' dates from 1863 and was written to mark the birth of Joachim's first child. The text from Emanuel von Geibel's Spanisches Liederbuch is a tender depiction of the nativity scene with the recurring refrain 'stillet die Wipfil! Es schlummert mein Kind' (silence the treetops/my child is sleeping). The song begins with the viola (tonight the cello) playing an old carol 'Josef, lieber Josef mein', the German words of the carol referring both to the nativity and also to Joachim's first name. Brahms intended the work to be performed by Joachim, Amalie and himself. By contrast the mellow Rückert setting 'Gestillte Sehnsucht' dates from a more troubled time. In 1884 Joachim became convinced that his wife was having an affair with the publisher Fritz Simrock and instigated divorce proceedings. Brahms seems to have composed this song in an attempt at creating a rapprochement between the couple but it did not work and Amalie's use of a sympathetic letter from Brahms during the divorce proceedings led to a break in the friendship between Brahms and Joachim which was not healed until Brahms composed a further peace offering, the Double Concerto, in 1887.

Franz Schubert's Auf dem Strom D.943 was composed for the tenor Ludwig Titze and the horn player Josef Lewy who performed them with Schubert at the piano in a public concert on 26 March 1828 devoted entirely to Schubert's music, the only such concert given in the composer's lifetime. When the work was published, an alternative for obbligato cello, which we will hear tonight, was included. While a first glance at the text may suggest this is a simple narrative of the poet setting off on a journey while thinking of those left behind, several

features suggest a different reading. Schubert had timed his concert to coincide with the anniversary of Beethoven's death and as musicologist Rufus Hallmark has pointed out *Auf dem Strom* contains a brief quotation from the funeral march of the *Eroica* Symphony. This first appears at the opening of the second verse and recurs later in this verse and also in the fourth verse. Whether or not one accepts the idea that this is a conscious homage to Beethoven, the foreboding with which the sea is depicted and the stormy fourth verse, depicting the journey to a dark wilderness from which no island can be seen and no sound heard, suggest that the journey undertaken is the death of the protagonist.

Texts & Translations

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

“Öffne dich, mein ganzes Herze”
from Cantata BWV 61

Öffne dich, mein ganzes Herze,
Jesus kömmt und ziehet ein.
Bin ich gleich nur Staub und Erde,
Will er mich doch nicht verschmäh'n,
Seine Lust an mir zu sehn,
Daß ich seine Wohnung werde.
O wie selig werd ich sein!

Open yourself, my entire heart,
Jesus comes and enters in.
Even though I am only dust and earth,
yet He does not scorn
to reveal His joy to me,
so that I may be His dwelling.
O how happy will I be!

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

arr. Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)
Five Spiritual Songs (Geistliche Lieder), a selection

Gedenke doch, mein Geist

Gedenke doch, mein Geist,
zurück an's Grab und an den
Glockenschlag,
Da man mich wird zur Ruh' begleiten,
auf dass ich klüglich sterben mag.
Schreib' dieses Wort in Herz und Brust:
'Gedenke, dass du sterben musst'.

Consider Then, My Soul Unwary

Consider then, my soul unwary,
the message of the tolling bell.
For soon eternal rest awaits thee,
prepare thyself for death as well.
Inscribe these words within thy heart:
'Recall how near to death thou art'.

Liebster Herr Jesu

Liebster Herr Jesu, wo bleibst du so lange?
Komm doch, mir wird hier auf Erden so
bange!
Komm doch und nimm mich, wenn dir es
gefällt,
Von der beschwerlichen, angstvollen Welt!

*Komm doch, Herr Jesus, wo bleibst du
so lange?
wo bleibst do so lange?
Komm doch, mir wird hier auf Erden so
bange,so bange!*

Es ist genug, Herr, d'rum komm zu erlösen
Meine bedrängete Seele vom Bösen!

Ich bin von Klagen und Seufzen so matt
Und meiner bitteren Tränen so satt!

Bist du bei mir

Bist du bei mir, geh' ich mit Freuden zum
Sterben und zu meiner Ruh',
zum Sterben und zu meiner Ruh'.

Bist du dei mir, geh' ich mit Freuden zum
Sterben und zu meiner Ruh',
zum Sterben zu meiner Ruh'.

Ach, wie vergnügt wär' so mein Ende,
es drückten deine schönen Hände mir die
getreuen Augen zu.

Dearest Lord Jesus

Dearest Lord Jesus, how long wilt thou tarry?
Come and release me from bondage so
weary,
Come, Lord, and take me away at thy will,
Far from this world with its burdens of ill.

*Come then, Lord Jesus; ah why dost thou
tarry?
Ah why dost thou tarry?
Come and release me from bondage so
weary, so weary!*

It is enough, Lord; come soon to release me,
Bring me some succour and comfort to ease
me;

Signing and mourning have frozen my heart;
Bitterly weeping, I long to depart.

If Thou Art Near

If thou art near, gladly I'll follow to death and
my eternal rest,
to death and my eternal rest.

If thou art near, gladly I'll follow to death and
my eternal rest,
to death and my eternal rest.

Ah, what delight were such a dying!
I feel upon my eyelids lying thy tender hands,
with comfort blest.

Ach, wie vergnügt wär' so mein Ende,
es drückten deine schönen Hände mir die
getreuen Augen zu.

Ah, what delight were such a dying!
I feel upon my eyelids lying thy tender hands,
with comfort blest.

Bist du bei mir, geh' ich mit Freuden zum
Sterben und zu meiner Ruh',
zum Sterben und zu meiner Ruh'.

If thou art near, gladly I'll follow to death and
my eternal rest,
to death and my eternal rest.

Komm, süsster Tod

Komm, süsster Tod, komm, sel'ge Ruh'!
Komm, und führe mich in Friede,
Weil ich der Welt bin müde.
Ach, komm, ich wart' auf dich,
Komm bald und führe mich,
drück' mir die Augen zu.
Komm, sel'ge Ruh'!

Come, Soothing Death

Come, soothing death, come, sweet repose!
Come, bear my soul to heaven
From mortal weariness shriven.
Ah come, I wait for thee,
Come to deliver me,
Ah let my eyelids close,
Come, sweet repose!

Komm, süsster Tod, komm, sel'ge Ruh'!
Ich will nun Jesum sehen und bei den
Engeln stehen.
Es ist ja nun vollbracht, Welt, darum gute
Nacht,
Mein' Augen schliess' ich zu.
Komm, sel'ge Ruh'!

Come, soothing death, come, sweet repose!
Saviour, I long to see thee and with the
Angels greet thee.
Now fades the day's pale light; World, take
my last 'good-night'.
My weary eyelids close,
Come, sweet repose!

John Cage (1912-1992)

The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs

night by silent sailing night,
Isobel,
wildwoods eyes and primarose hair,
quietly,
all the woods so wild
in mauves of moss and dahne dewes
how all so still she lay
'neath of the white thorn,
child of tree
like some lost happy leaf
like blowing flower stilled

as fain would she anon
for soon again 'twill be,
win me, woo me, wed me,
ah! weary me
deeply,
now even calm lay sleeping
night,
Isobel,
Sister Isobel,
Saintette Isobel,
Madame Isa Veuve La Belle.

John Tavener (1944-2013)

Akhmatova songs, a selection

Boris Pasternak (1936)

Endowed with some eternal childhood,
he shone open-handed, clean of sight,
The whole earth was his heritage,
And this with all he shared.

Couplet (1924)

For me praise from others- as ashes,
But from you even blame - is praise.

Dante (1936)

And even after death he did not return
to Florence, his of old.
In going, he gave no backward glance,
to him I sing this song.....
From hell he sent his curses upon her,
and in heaven he could not forget
her.....

*Akhmatova texts - translated from the
Russian by Mother Thekla Orthodox
Monastery of the Assumption. Normanby,
Whitby, North Yorkshire.*

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Zwei Gesänge, Op. 91

Gestillte Sehnsucht

In goldnen Abendschein getaucht,
Wie feierlich die Wälder stehn!
In leise Stimmen der Vöglein hauchet
Des Abendwindes leises Wehn.
Was lispeln die Winde, die Vögelein?
Sie lispeln die Welt in Schlummer ein.
Ihr Wünsche, die ihr stets euch reget
Im Herzen sonder Rast und Ruh!
Du Sehnen, das die Brust bewegt,
Wann ruhest du, wann schlummerst du?
Beim Lispeln der Winde, der Vögelein,
Ihr sehnenenden Wünsche, wann schlaft ihr
ein?

Ach, wenn nicht mehr in goldne Fernen
Mein Geist auf Traumgefieder eilt,
Nicht mehr an ewig fernen Sternen
Mit sehnenendem Blick mein Auge weilt;
Dann lispeln die Winde, die Vögelein
Mit meinem Sehnen mein Leben ein.

Friedrich Rückert

Assuaged longing

Bathed in golden evening light,
How solemnly the forests stand!
The evening winds mingle softly
With the soft voices of the birds.
What do the winds, the birds whisper?
They whisper the world to sleep.
But you, my desires, ever stirring
In my heart without respite!
You, my longing, that agitates my breast –
When will you rest, when will you sleep?
The winds and the birds whisper,
But when will you, yearning desires,
slumber?

Ah! when my spirit no longer hastens
On wings of dreams into golden distances,
When my eyes no longer dwell yearningly
On eternally remote stars;
Then shall the winds, the birds whisper
My life – and my longing – to sleep.

English Translation by Richard Stokes

Geistliches Wiegenlied

Die ihr schwebet
Um diese Palmen
In Nacht und Wind,
Ihr heil'gen Engel,
Stillet die Wipfel!
Es schlummert mein Kind.

Ihr Palmen von Bethlehem
Im Windesbrausen,
Wie mögt ihr heute
So zornig sausen!
O rauscht nicht also!

Schweiget, neiget
Euch leis' und lind;
Stillet die Wipfel!
Es schlummert mein Kind.

Der Himmelsknabe
Duldet Beschwerde,
Ach, wie so müd' er ward
Vom Leid der Erde.

Ach nun im Schlaf ihm
Leise gesänftigt
Die Qual zerrinnt,
Stillet die Wipfel!
Es schlummert mein Kind.

A sacred cradle song

You who hover
Around these palms
In night and wind,
You holy angels,
Silence the tree-tops!
My child is sleeping.

You palms of Bethlehem
In the raging wind,
Why do you bluster
So angrily today!
O roar not so!

Be still, lean
Calmly and gently over us;
Silence the tree-tops!
My child is sleeping.

The heavenly babe
Suffers distress,
Oh, how weary He has grown
With the sorrows of this world.

Ah, now that in sleep
His pains
Are gently eased,
Silence the treetops!
My child is sleeping.

Grimmige Kälte
Sauset hernieder,
Womit nur deck' ich
Des Kindleins Glieder!

Fierce cold
Blows down on us,
With what shall I cover
My little child's limbs?

O all ihr Engel,
Die ihr geflügelt
Wandelt im Wind,
Stillet die Wipfel!
Es schlummert mein kind.

O all you angels,
Who wing your way
On the winds,
Silence the tree-tops!
My child is sleeping.

Emanuel Geibel

English Translation by Richard Stokes

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Auf dem Strom, D. 943

Nim die letzten Abschiedsküsse,
und die wehenden, die Grösse,
Die ich noch ans Ufer sende,
eh' dein Fuss sich scheidend wende!
Schon wird von des Stromes Wogen
rasch der Nachen fortgezogen,
Doch den thränendunklen Blick
zieht die Sehnsucht stets zurück!

Take these last farewell kisses,
and the wafted greetings
that I send to the shore,
before your foot turns to leave.
Already the boat is pulled away
by the waves' rapid current;
but longing forever draws back
my gaze, clouded with tears.

Und so trägt mich denn die Welle
Fort mit unerflehter Schnelle.
Ach, schon ist die Flur verschwunden,
Wo ich selig Sie gefunden!
Ewig hin, ihr Wonnetage!
Hoffnungsleer verhallt die Klage

And so the waves bear me away
with relentless speed.
Ah, already the meadows
where, overjoyed,
I found her have disappeared.
Days of bliss, you are gone for ever!

Um das schöne Heimatland,
Wo ich ihre Liebe fand.

Sieh, wie flieht der Strand vorüber,
Und wie drängt es mich hinüber,
Zieht mit unnennbaren Banden,
An der Hütte dort zu landen,
In der Laube dort zu weilen;
Doch des Stromes Wellen eilen
Weiter ohne Rast und Ruh,
Führen mich dem Weltmeer zu!

Ach, vor jener dunklen Wüste,
Fern von jeder heitern Küste,
Wo kein Eiland zu erschauen,
O, wie fasst mich zitternd Grauen!
Wehmutstränen sanft zu bringen,
Kann kein Lied vom Ufer dringen;
Nur der Sturm weht kalt daher
Durch das grau gehobne Meer!

Kann des Auges sehndend Schweifen
Keine Ufer mehr ergreifen,
Nun so schau' ich zu den Sternen
Auf in jenen heil'gen Fernen!
Ach, bei ihrem milden Scheine
Nannt' ich sie zuerst die Meine;
Dort vielleicht, o tröstend Glück!
Dort begeg'n ich ihrem Blick.

Hopelessly my lament echoes
round the fair homeland where I found her
love.

See how the shore flies past,
and how mysterious ties
draw me across
to a land by yonder cottage,
to linger in yonder arbour.
But the river's waves rush onwards,
without respite,
bearing me on towards the ocean.

Ah, how I tremble with dread
at that dark wilderness,
far from every cheerful shore,
where no island can be seen!
No song can reach me from the shore
to bring forth tears of gentle sadness;
only the tempest blows cold
across the grey, angry sea.

If my wistful, roaming eyes
can no longer descry the shore,
I shall look up to the stars
there in the sacred distance.
Ah! By their gentle radiance
I first called her mine;
there, perhaps, O consoling fate,
there I shall meet her gaze