

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 11 December 2023
1.00pm

Love's Philosophy

Roderick Williams baritone
Iain Burnside piano

Roger Quilter (1877-1953)

Love's philosophy Op. 3 No. 1 (1904-5)

Mel Bonis (1858-1937)

Chanson d'amour Op. 94 (?1888)

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

From *5 mélodies 'de Venise'* Op. 58 (1891)
Mandoline • En sourdine • Green

Roger Quilter

Now sleeps the crimson petal Op. 3 No. 2 (1904-5)

Mel Bonis

Songe Op. 91 No. 3 (c.1912)

Roger Quilter

Fill a glass with golden wine Op. 3 No. 3 (1904-5)

Alma Mahler (1879-1964)

Die stille Stadt (pub. 1910)

Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979)

Stimme im Dunkeln (?1904)

Alma Mahler

Bei dir ist es traut (pub. 1910)

Rebecca Clarke

Aufblick (1904)

Alma Mahler

Laue Sommernacht (pub. 1910)

Sergey Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

She is as lovely as the noon Op. 14 No. 9 (1896)

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Colloque sentimental from *Fêtes galantes Book II* (1904)

Sergey Rachmaninov

When yesterday we met Op. 26 No. 13 (1906)

Claude Debussy

Oh no, I beg you, forsake me not Op. 4 No. 1 (1890-3)

Green from *Ariettes oubliées* (1885-7, rev. 1903)

Beau soir (c.1887-8)

Sergey Rachmaninov

How fair this spot Op. 21 No. 7 (1902)

I was with her Op. 14 No. 4 (1896)



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Love's philosophy

Shelley's *Love's philosophy* supplies the theme of tonight's recital. The poem was presented on 29 December 1820 to Sophia Stacey, the ward of one of Shelley's uncles. Shelley spent a great deal of time with her, visiting the Uffizi and other galleries. The attraction was mutual, and it is likely that *Love's philosophy* and *I fear thy kisses, gentle maiden* were written for her.

Quilter's setting builds memorably to a broad climax with a rich harmonic accumulation of appoggiaturas. Tennyson's *Now sleeps the crimson petal* comes from *The Princess*, a work that describes a Victorian country house party at which a succession of stories are told by the aristocratic guests. One story tells of an arranged marriage between a prince and a princess who have never met. They are discovered, and in the ensuing mock-heroic battle the prince is injured. The princess nurses him back to health, falls in love with her victim – and they eventually marry. *Now sleeps the crimson petal* is read by the princess at the bedside of the injured prince while he sleeps. 'Fill a glass with golden wine' sets a poem by William Ernest Henley whose world-weariness appealed to Quilter's own melancholy nature.

Mélanie (Mel) Bonis was a Parisian composer who in 1874 matriculated at the Conservatoire where she received tuition from César Franck. Though as a woman composer she encountered huge prejudice and though her parents withdrew her from the Conservatoire, her work-list numbers some 300 pieces, including works for solo piano, orchestra, chamber music and, of course, *mélodies*. Of her 35 songs, published by Fortin-Armiane, we hear 'Chanson d'amour' and 'Songe', settings of poems by Maurice Bouchor.

The Venetian première of **Fauré's** 'Mandoline' and 'En sourdine' – and likely also 'Green' – is described by the Princesse de Polignac in her *Memoirs*.

Several Parisian friends were staying with me at the same time as Gabriel Fauré; one of them, Madame Ernest Duez, having a lovely voice, we were in the habit of going out on the lagoon after dinner in a *Peata* (large fishing boat) and we had got together a little orchestra of five or six musicians. When Fauré brought back nearly every day one of his lovely songs, Madame Duez and the little orchestra rehearsed them on the lagoon. Fauré played a little portable yacht piano that one of my brothers had given me. And thus I heard for the first time 'Mandoline', 'En sourdine' and the three other songs that he dedicated to me, and they form the five *Mélodies 'de Venise'* that are so beautiful.

It was only after nine years of marriage that Mahler urged his wife **Alma** to have her songs published, and in the summer of 1910 he selected five of her Lieder composed in 1900-1 and had them published by Universal at the same time as his own Eighth

Symphony, which he dedicated to her. We hear three of them this evening. 'Laue Sommernacht', first performed in New York in 1910, when it was encored, much to Mahler's delight; 'Bei dir ist es traut', a setting of a poem by Rilke; and 'Die stille Stadt', to a text by Richard Dehmel that had already been successfully set by Sibelius and was later to attract Pfitzner.

Born in Harrow of American-German parentage, **Rebecca Clarke** claimed that her love for music was first awakened by hearing Brahms's Opus 91 songs with viola accompaniment. She was the first female member of Henry Wood's New Queen's Hall Orchestra, which she joined in 1912. Her output of nearly 100 pieces includes choral and chamber works, as well as music for solo piano and songs. We hear two of her Dehmel settings this evening, 'Stimme im Dunkeln' and 'Aufblick'.

Five of **Rachmaninov's** finest songs punctuate this evening's recital. 'She is as lovely as the noon' sets a poem by Nikolay Minsky whose words contrast the life of a woman who has not suffered (unchanging rhythm in the vocal line) with that of an artist who knows only grief and struggle. 'Oh no, I beg you, forsake me not' is the poet's gentle plea to the beloved not to abandon him – a mood that in the music turns bitter. Rachmaninov transcribed several of his songs for solo piano – a clear indication of the importance he attached to the accompaniment, as we see in 'How fair this spot', where the melody lingers in the postlude as though to prolong the image of his dream. The text of Alexey Koltsov's 'I was with her' is sung by the lover who, when told to keep his beloved's desire for him secret, vows to be faithful, even though she might falter. The man's resolve ('I will never be a traitor') is powerfully depicted in the final four bars by a *fortissimo* dynamic, a plethora of *marcati* in the accompaniment and a wonderfully expressive *tenuto* on a dotted crotchet. 'When yesterday we met' describes how a relationship, which once flamed with passion, has turned cold. The simple, understated accompaniment accords well with the resigned and lifeless expression of the erstwhile lovers.

'Colloque sentimentale' is a dialogue between two ghostly figures who recall their lost love. **Debussy** sets the words of one lover to a rich texture that contrasts vividly with the plain chordal style of the other. Despite the intensity of their emotions, the voices never rise above *piano*. Debussy's reading of Verlaine's 'Green' sees the poem as a passionate and successful declaration of love, and indicates that the song should be performed in a mood that is *joyusement animé*. The *carpe diem* theme of Bourget's *Beau soir* is hardly original, but there's a broad sweep to the verse that clearly attracted Debussy. The melody is appropriately spacious, and there's an expressive marking of *plus lent* at the end of the song to convey the imminence of death – but without sentimentality.

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