

WIGMORE HALL 125

Saturday 11 October 2025
7.30pm

Jakub Józef Orliński countertenor
Michał Biel piano

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)	Voi che udite il mio lamento from <i>Agrippina</i> HWV6 (1709) Un zeffiro spirò from <i>Rodelinda</i> HWV19 (1725)
Tadeusz Baird (1928-1981)	Spójrz co tu ciche serce wypisało (1956) Drwię, mając ciebie, z całej ludzkiej pychy (1956) Słodka miłości (1956) Jakże podobna zimie jest rozłąka (1956)
Henry Purcell (1659-1695)	Sweeter than roses Z585 (1695) What power art thou from <i>King Arthur</i> Z628 (1691)
George Frideric Handel	Coronato il crin d'alloro from <i>Agrippina</i> HWV6 (1709) <i>Interval</i>
George Frideric Handel Henry Purcell	Verdi prati from <i>Alcina</i> HWV34 (1735) If music be the food of love Z379a (?1691-2) O lead me to some peaceful gloom from <i>Bonduca, or The British Heroine</i> Z574 (1695)
George Frideric Handel Mieczysław Karłowicz (1876-1909)	Siam prossimi al porto from <i>Rinaldo</i> HWV7 (1711, rev. 1717-31) Idzie na pola Op. 3 No. 3 (1896) Smutną jest dusza moja Op. 1 No. 6 (1895-6) Skąd pierwsze gwiazdy Op. 1 No. 2 (1895-6) Po szerokim morzu Op. 3 No. 9 (1896) Mów do mnie jeszcze Op. 3 No. 1 (1896) Rdzawe liście strząsa z drzew (1896) Czasem gdy długo na pół sennie marze (1895)
George Frideric Handel	Furibondo spira il vento from <i>Partenope</i> HWV27 (1730)



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A countertenor recital is never simply a sequence of songs: it is a theatre of emotions. When *Agrippina* burst onto the stage of Venice's Carnevale of 1709, Cardinal Vincenzo Grimaldi's chaotic libretto may have been a flashy satire only conceivable by a priest moonlighting as politician and impresario and **Handel's** arias of the spectacle only he could provide, but it took a countertenor to bring the show to a standstill. Amid all the fireworks and intrigue, when 'Voi che udite il mio lamento' emerges with sustained and utterly uninhibited misery it is hard to know whether to listen for pathos or comedy. Handel makes it work both ways, though, and there is such grief behind Ottone's self-indulgence that the audience is constantly on a knife-edge. 'Un zeffiro spirò' from *Rodelinda* totally reverses this theatrical tack, though: Unulfo's examination of his friendship with Bertarido is so restrained that it is less visceral suffering and more an oasis of true feeling in a desert of relentless betrayal. As a pair they show off Handel's skill with emotion at the extremes of grandiosity and simplicity but, in both cases, it takes a countertenor to do it justice.

Centuries later, **Tadeusz Baird's** miniature song cycle *4 Love Sonnets* of 1956 belong to a different type of theatre. Polish translations of Shakespeare's sonnets, they are small-but-dramatic vignettes of dissonance and unresolved harmony. Baird's life was tense in itself: as a teenager in the War, he was sent to prison for his role in the Polish Resistance, later becoming one of the country's most prominent composers when he founded the famous Warsaw Autumn Festival. He died violently in Warsaw in the early 1980s, and there is a sense of the same fragility behind the economy of expression in these songs – miniature soliloquies from miniature plays.

A century and a half earlier, **Henry Purcell** had been doing something similar but concentrating on the body. 'Song' hardly covers the skill and variety with which he applied text to music, or his endless inventiveness in combining them into the physical manifestation of a feeling. *Sweeter than roses* paints an overwhelming physical desire which starts as a whisper and grows in warmth and volume into a picture so graphic it feels less like a Handelian metaphor and more like an actual physical fact. At the other extreme, his allegorical Cold Genius from *King Arthur* literally chills the audience with broken phrases like breath freezing in mid-air in 'What power art thou'. His shorter songs are no less dramatic: *If music be the food of love* is an upward spiral of intoxication and greed, while 'O lead me to some peaceful gloom' depicts a very English descent into sadness.

The celebration behind **Handel's** 'Coronato il crin d'alloro', again from *Agrippina*, is, on the face of it, less ambiguous, but in that is one of Handel's great achievements: while Ottone prepares with euphoric

words to be crowned Emperor, a melody far more agitated than it should be hints at the plot twist yet to come. This is not an aria about the experience it says it is, and nor is 'Verdi prati' (from *Alcina*), where the enchanted meadows of the sorceress Alcina's island are painted in the plainest of colours that dissolve into nothing as Ruggiero sees it for what it really is. This incredibly simple theatre of disillusionment was considered so unsingably simple by Giovanni Carestini, Handel's first Ruggiero, that he stormed over to his house to tell him how far it was beneath him, and that he should be given something more impressive to sing. Handel's outraged response – 'You toc! Don't I know better than you what is best for you to sing?' – saved an aria that Charles Burney described at the time as 'constantly encored' and which is now one of Handel's most famous. His judgement won out in *Rodelinda*, too, where machinery throwing scenery around in its 1711 première caused critics to call it 'absurd,' but whose thrilled audiences made it his first fully Italian hit in London. 'Siam prossimi al porto' creates one of its most vivid images, rising and falling as Eustazio returns to harbour and safety amongst all the mess on the stage.

Like his countryman Baird, **Mieczysław Karłowicz** found drama in his songs through more solitary reflection than Handel or Purcell. A lifelong mountaineer, his songs are concentrated examples of his relationship with single aspects of the nature of his homeland: inner turmoil in *Idzie na pola* is painted like windy fields with relentless arpeggios in the piano, emotional exhaustion is hidden in the drooping chromatic harmonies of *Smutna jest dusza moja*, while wishing for something always out of reach is found in the melody of *Skąd pierwsze gwiadzy* which constantly strains upwards. The lullaby-rocking of *Mów do mnie jeszcze* feels like grief for the past, while the falling motifs (again in the piano) in *Rdzawe liście strazasa z drzew* and *Czasem gdy długo na pól sennie marze* belong more to the other end of life.

Handel has the last word, though, and that word is: fury. In 'Furibondo spira il vento,' from *Partenope*, Arsace unleashes all his confusion in a virtuosic collision of scales, whirls and melodic extremes as he pursues Partenope despite his enduring feelings for Rosmira. The first Arsace, Antonio Bernacchi, was as much a force of nature as the music itself and changed the notes with such extravagant ornaments so often that Handel often brought up his habit of '[singing] the notes better than I had written them.' He drove Handel to distraction, but his frustration is simply an illustration of the countertenor's unique ability to blend intimacy and deception into music that is always theatre, and one that is always about the art of feeling.

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George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Voi che udite il mio lamento from *Agrippina* You who hear my lament

HWV6 (1709)
Cardinal Vincenzo Grimani

Ottone Voi ch'udite il mio lamento, Compatite il mio dolor!	Ottone You who hear my lament, have pity on my grief.
Perdo un trono, e pur lo sprezzo, Ma quel ben che tanto apprezzo, Ahi che perderlo è tormento Che disanima il mio cor.	I am losing a throne, yet I despise it; but the jewel I value so highly, alas, her loss so torments me that my heart is crushed.

Un zeffiro spirò from *Rodelinda* A gentle breeze

HWV19 (1725)
Nicola Francesco Haym, after Antonio Salvi and Pierre Corneille

Unulfo Un zeffiro spirò Che serenò quest'alma, E calma vi portò. S'io salvo il mio signore, Altro non brama il core, E pace allora avrò.	Unulfo A gentle breeze has soothed and calmed my spirits. If I can save my lord king, my heart will have no other desire and I shall then have peace.
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Tadeusz Baird (1928-1981)

Spójrz co tu ciche serce wypisało (1956) O learn to read what silent love hath writ!

William Shakespeare, trans. Maciej Słomczyński

Jak lichy aktor, co stojąc na scenie, Zapomniał z trwogi słów do swojej roli, Lub ogarnięte wściekłością stworzenie, Któremu gniew się ruszyć nie pozwoli, Tak ja, nie wierząc, bym umiał wystawić Nadmiar miłości, straciłem już wiarę I tonę w uczuć wezbranych powodzi Pod namiętności zbyt wielkim ciężarem.	As an unperfect actor on the stage, who with his fear is put besides his part, or some fierce thing replete with too much rage, whose strength's abundance weakens his own heart; so I, for fear of trust, forget to say the perfect ceremony of love's rite, and in mine own love's strength seem to decay, o'ercharged with burden of mine own love's might.
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O, niech więc za mnie mówią księgi moje, Milczący serca mojego postowie, Które o miłość błaga i nagrodę, Chociaż słowami tego nie wypowie. Spójrz, co tu ciche serce wypisało: Słuchaj oczyma, to miłości prawo.	O let my books be then the eloquence and dumb presagers of my speaking breast, who plead for love and look for recompense more than that tongue that more hath more express'd. O learn to read what silent love hath writ! To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit.
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Drwię, mając ciebie, z całej ludzkiej pychy Having thee, of all men's pride I boast

(1956)
William Shakespeare, trans. Maciej Słomczyński

Jedni ród sławią, inni zřęczność swoją, Inni swe skarby, inni ciała siłę, Inni strój modny, choć im źle go skroją, Inni sokoły, psy i konie miłe. I każdy jedno ma upodobanie, Które najwięcej radości mu sprawia, Lecz nie chcę z nimi wchodzić w porównanie, Nad wszystko dobre, moje lepszym stawiam. Dla mnie twa miłość lepsza, niż ród stary, Droższa niż skarby i strojów przepychy, Milsza niż sokół, konie i ogary. Drwię, mając ciebie, z całej ludzkiej pychy. Lecz wynędziałem od tego zarazem, Drżąc, że odejdiesz, czyniąc mnie nędzarzem.	Some glory in their birth, some in their skill, some in their wealth, some in their body's force, some in their garments, though new-fangled ill, some in their hawks and hounds, some in their horse; and every humour hath his adjunct pleasure, wherein it finds a joy above the rest: but these particulars are not my measure; all these I better in one general best. Thy love is better than high birth to me, richer than wealth, prouder than garments' cost, of more delight than hawks or horses be; and having thee, of all men's pride I boast: wretched in this alone, that thou may'st take all this away, and me most wretched make.
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Please do not turn the page until the song and its accompaniment have ended.

Słodka miłości (1956)
William Shakespeare, trans.
Maciej Słomczyński

Słodka miłości, wróć, by nie mówiono,
Że siły twoje od twych pragnień słabsze,
Pragnienia, choć je dzisiaj nakarmiono,
Jutro powrócą, tak ostre jak zawsze.
Więc wróć! Choć dzisiaj twoje głodne oczy
Mrużą się, ciężkie sennym nasyceniem,
Jutro spójrz znowu i ducha miłości
Nie chcesz zabijać zbyt długim znużeniem.
Niech odpoczynek będzie oceanem
Dzielącym brzegi, na które przybyło
Dwoje kochanków młodych, by nad ranem
Pobłogosławić wracającą miłość.
Lub zwij to zimą, której mroźna szata
Po trzykroć każe oczekiwać lata.

Jakże podobna zimie jest rozłaka (1956)
William Shakespeare, trans.
Maciej Słomczyński

Jakże podobna zimie jest rozłaka
Z tobą, radości przelotnego roku!
Jakiż chłód czułem, w jakich mrokach,
Jaka grudniowa pustka była wokół!
A przecież właśnie przechodziło lato
I jesień płodna, cała w drogich plonach,
Niosąc wiosny urodzaj bogaty
Jak owdowiała i brzemienna żona.
Lecz dla mnie były te plony dojrzałe
Gorzkim owocem mego smutku tylko,

Sweet Love

Sweet love, renew thy force; be it not said
thy edge should blunter be than appetite,
which but today by feeding is allay'd,
tomorrow sharpened in his former might:
so, love, be thou;
although today thou fill thy hungry eyes even till
they wink with fullness,
tomorrow see again, and do not kill
the spirit of love with a perpetual dullness.
Let this sad interim like the ocean be
which parts the shore, where two contracted new
come daily to the banks, that when they see
return of love, more blest may be the view;
else call it winter, which being full of care,
makes summer's welcome, thrice more wish'd, more rare.

How like a winter hath my absence been

How like a winter hath my absence been
from thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!
What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen!
What old December's bareness everywhere!
And yet this time remov'd was summer's time,
the teeming autumn, big with rich increase,
bearing the wanton burden of the prime,
like widow'd wombs after their lord's decease.
Yet this abundant issue seem'd to me
but hope of orphans and unfather'd fruit;

Bo czym bez ciebie jest lato wspaniałe?
Gdy ciebie nie ma, nawet ptaki milkną
Lub zaczynają z takim smutkiem śpiewać,
Że, drżąc przed zimą, liść blednie na drzewach.
for summer and his pleasures wait on thee,
and thou away, the very birds are mute;
or if they sing, 'tis with so dull a cheer
that leaves look pale, dreading the winter's near.

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Sweeter than roses Z585 (1695)
Anonymous

Sweeter than roses,
Or cool evening breeze on a warm flowery shore,
Was the dear kiss first trembling made me freeze,
Then shot like fire all o'er.
What magic has victorious love!
For all I touch or see since that dear kiss,
I hourly prove, all is love to me.

What power art thou from King Arthur Z628 (1691)
John Dryden

What power art thou, who from below
Hast made me rise unwillingly and slow
From beds of everlasting snow?
See'st thou not how stiff and wondrous old,
Far unfit to bear the bitter cold,
I can scarcely move or draw my breath?
Let me, let me freeze again to death.

George Frideric Handel

Coronato il crin d'alloro from Agrippina HWV6 (1709)
Cardinal Vincenzo Grimani

Ottone
Coronato il crin d'alloro
Io sarò nel Campidoglio.
Ma più bramo il bel ch'adoro
Che non fo corona e soglio.

On the Capital shall I be crowned

Ottone
On the Capitol shall I be crowned
with the laurel wreath.
Yet I yearn more for the beauty I adore
than I do for crown or throne.

Interval

George Frideric Handel

Verdi prati from *Alcina* Green meadows HWV34 (1735)

*Anonymous, adapted by
Riccardo Broschi after
Ariosto*

Verdi prati, selve amene, Perderete la beltà.	Green meadows, lovely woods, you will lose your beauty,
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Vaghi fior, correnti rivi, La vaghezza, la bellezza Presto in voi si cangerà.	pretty flowers, rapid brooks, your charm and beauty will soon change.
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Verdi prati, selve mene, Perderete la beltà.	Green meadows, lovely woods, you will lose your beauty,
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E cangiato il vago oggetto All'orror del primo aspetto Tutto in voi ritornerà.	The beautiful object has changed, to the dismay of the first glance, then everything will return in you.
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Henry Purcell

If music be the food of love Z379a (?1691-2) *Henry Heveningham*

If music be the food of love,
Sing on till I am fill'd with joy;
For then my list'ning soul you move
To pleasures that can never cloy.
Your eyes, you mien, your tongue declare
That you are music ev'rywhere.

Pleasures invade both eye and ear,
So fierce the transports are, they wound,
And all my senses feasted are,
Tho' yet the feast is only sound,
Sure I must perish by your charms,
Unless you save me in your arms.

O lead me to some peaceful gloom from *Bonduca, or The British Heroine* Z574 (1695) *John Fletcher*

O lead me to some peaceful gloom,
Where none but sighing lovers come,
Where the shrill trumpets never sound,
But one eternal hush goes round.
There let me soothe my pleasing pain,
And never think of war again.
What glory can a lover have,
To conquer, yet be still a slave?

George Frideric Handel

Siam prossimi al porto from *Rinaldo* HWV7 (1711, rev. 1717-31) *Giacomo Rossi and Aaron Hill*

Siam prossimi al porto, Per prender conforto Al nostro penar.	We are near the port, to find comfort for our pains.
Ch'il cor si consoli, Il duolo s'involi Da chi sa sperar.	May the heart be consoled, the sorrow banished from he who knows how to hope.

Mieczysław Karłowicz (1876-1909)

Idzie na pola Op. 3 It goes over fields No. 3 (1896) *Kazimierz Przerwa- Tetmajer*

Idzie na pola, idzie na bory, Na łąki i na sady, Na sine wody, na śnieżne góry, Na miesiąc idzie błądy.	It goes over fields, through woods, across meadows and orchards, over blue-grey waters, snowcapped mountains, in the pale light of the moon.
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Idzie w niezmierną otchłań wszechświata, Skąd pył dróg mlecznych prószy, Idzie błękitna, cicha, skrzydlata — Muzyka mojej duszy.	Through the limitless cosmic abyss, from whence the Milky Way's stardust is strewn, cerulean, silent, and winged, it moves — the music of my soul.
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**Smutną jest dusza
moja Op. 1 No. 6 (1895-6)**

*Kazimierz Przerwa-
Tetmajer*

Smutną jest dusza moja aż
do śmierci –
Opuszczam ręce, niech się
co chce dzieje,
Już mi cios żaden mózgu nie
przewierci,
Bom już zeń wygnał do
szczętu nadzieję.

I oto stoję, milczący jak we
śnie,
Nad urną pragnień mych,
rozbitą w ćwierci,
A żem ją stracić musiał w
proch tak wcześniej,
Smutną jest dusza moja aż
do śmierci.

My soul is sorrowful

My soul is sorrowful unto
death –
I lower my hands, come
what may,
now no further blow can
pierce my brain,
for I have already banished
all hope from it.

And here I stand, silent as
in a dream,
over the shattered urn of
my desires.
But that I had to cast them in
the dust so soon,
my soul is sorrowful unto
death.

**Skąd pierwsze gwiazdy
Op. 1 No. 2 (1895-6)**

Juliusz Słowacki

Skąd pierwsze gwiazdy na
niebie zaświecą,
Tam pójde, aż za
ciemnych skał
krawędzie.
Spojrzę w lecące po
niebie łabędzie

I tam polecę, gdzie one polecą.

Bo i tu, i tam,
za morzem,
i wszędzie,
Gdzie tylko poszlę przed
sobą myśl biedną,
Zawsze mi smutno
i wszędzie mi
jedno;
I wszędzie mi źle — i wiem,
że źle będzie.

**Where the first stars
light up**

Where the first stars light
up the heavens,
that's where I shall go, as
far as the edge of the
dark cliff.
I shall direct my gaze at
the swans flying across
the sky
and fly whither they fly.

For both here and there,
beyond the sea and
everywhere
I might go, my wretched
thoughts are before me,
I am always sad, and it
makes no difference to
me where I am,
and it is hard for me
everywhere, and I know
it will be hard.

**Po szerokim morzu
Op. 3 No. 9 (1896)**

*Kazimierz Przerwa-
Tetmajer*

Po szerokim, po szerokim
morzu
Płynie okręt z kotwicą
urwaną,
Wiatr go pędzi coraz dalej,
dalej
W przestrzeń pustą,
chmurną, ołowianą.

Po szerokim, po szerokim
morzu
Nie do brzegu ty płyniesz
okręcie,
O podwodną gdzieś
uderzysz skałę
I bez śladu przepadniesz w
odmęcie.

Upon the vast ocean

Upon the vast, vast
ocean
sails a ship without an
anchor,
the wind drives it farther
and farther
into the gloomy, leaden
abyss.

Upon the vast, vast
ocean
your ship will not make it
to shore,
it will be dashed against
the submerged rocks
and you will be lost in the
depths without a trace.

**Mów do mnie jeszcze
Op. 3 No. 1 (1896)**

*Kazimierz Przerwa-
Tetmajer*

Mów do mnie jeszcze ... z
oddali, z oddali,
Głos twój mi płynie na
powietrznej fali.
Jak kwiatem, każdym
słowem twym się pieścę,
Mów do mnie jeszcze...

Mów do mnie jeszcze ... te
płynące ku mnie słowa
Są jakby modlitwa przy
trumnie.
I w sercu śmierci wywołują
dreszcze,
Mów do mnie jeszcze...

Carry on, talk to me

Carry on, talk to me ...
from far, far away
your voice flows to me on
the air.
Your words soothe my
senses like flowers.
Carry on, talk to me...

Carry on, talk to me ... your
words sound to my ear
like a prayer at the
coffin.
My heart shivers from
deathly fear,
Carry on, talk to me...

Rdzawe liście strząsa z drzew (1896)

Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer

Rdzawe liście strząsa z drzew
Wiatr jesienny i gna je precz;
Poniesione w chłodną dal
Nie powrócą nigdy wstecz.

Żaden z liści więcej już
Nie odrósł na swym pniu,
Poniesiony w chłodną dal
Nie powróci nigdy tu.

Nie powrócą nigdy tu,
W moje serce, do mej krwi,
Te marzenia, które czas
I poznanie wzięły mi.

Czasem gdy długo na pół sennie marze (1895)

Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer

Czasem, gdy długo na pół sennie marzę,
Cudny kobiecy głos mię skądś dolata,
Anielskie śpiewający pieśni,
Piękniejsze niżeli wszystkie pieśni świata.

W głos ten się całą zasłuchuję duszą,
Serce mi z piersi tęsknota wyrwa, poszedłbym za nim wszędzie!
Nie wiem czy to miłość, czy śmierć tak odzywa.

Rust-coloured leaves

Rust-coloured leaves are shaken from the trees
by the autumn wind, and it drives them away;
carried into the cold distance
they shall never return.

None of the leaves will ever grow back on its branch,
carried into the cold distance
none shall ever return.

And never to return to my heart, to my blood
are the dreams that time and experience have taken from me.

Sometimes when long I drowsily dream

Sometimes when long I drowsily dream,
from somewhere, a woman's wonderful voice reaches me,
singing angelic songs,
more beautiful than all the songs in the world.

I listen to the voice with all my soul;
longing wrenches my heart – I would follow the voice anywhere!
I do not know if this is love or death that sings.

George Frideric Handel

Furibondo spira il vento from *Partenope* HWV27 (1730)

Furibondo spira il vento
E sconvolge il cielo e il suol.

Tal adesso l'alma io sento
Agitata dal mio duol.

Furiously blows the wind

Furiously blows the wind
and upsets sky and the earth.

Likewise now I feel my soul
troubled by my sorrow.

Translation of Handel 'Voi che udite il mio lamento' by © Avril Bardoni.
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