

WIGMORE HALL 125

Friday 12 December 2025
1.00pm

Sir Willard White bass-baritone
Eugene Asti piano

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)	From <i>Myrthen</i> Op. 25 (1840) Widmung • Hauptmanns Weib Dein Angesicht Op. 127 No. 2 (1840) Die beiden Grenadiere Op. 49 No. 1 (1840)
Franz Schubert (1797-1828)	Der Wanderer D489 (1816) From <i>Schwanengesang</i> D957 (1828) Der Atlas • Die Stadt • Das Fischermädchen • Der Doppelgänger
Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)	The Ash Grove from <i>Vol. 1 British Isles</i> (1941-2) From <i>Vol. 3 British Isles</i> (1945-6) The Foggy, Foggy Dew • O Waly, Waly Oliver Cromwell from <i>Vol. 1 British Isles</i>
Aaron Copland (1900-1990)	From <i>Old American Songs I</i> (1950) The Boatmen's Dance • Long time ago
Kurt Weill (1900-1950)	September Song from <i>Knickerbocker Holiday</i> (1938)
Stephen Flaherty (b.1960)	Make Them Hear You from <i>Ragtime</i> (1996)



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In 1840, **Robert Schumann** and Clara Wieck were finally able to marry following lengthy objections from Clara's father. Robert composed prolifically that year, with many of the dozens of songs written throughout his so-called *Liederjahr* either dedicated to or inspired by Clara. *Myrthen*, Op. 25, was his wedding present for her – a bouquet of 26 songs which he had beautifully bound for the occasion. From *Myrthen* we hear two contrasting songs: the famous romantic opener 'Widmung' (Rückert) and the punchy 'Hauptmanns Weib', a military love poem by Robert Burns which Schumann set in German translation. Schumann wrote more songs in 1840 than were published straight away, as numbers were edited out of cycles and collections changed shape. 'Dein Angesicht' (Heine) was originally destined for *Dichterliebe* but was eventually published as part of Op. 127 over a decade later. Heine and Schumann both admired Napoleon: the boisterous ballad 'Die beiden Grenadiere' depicts two soldiers returning, defeated, to France, with one pledging final allegiance with a rendition of the *Marseillaise* before the piano's postlude mourns his death.

The figure of 'The Wanderer' haunts **Franz Schubert's** music. In his setting of Lübeck's poem, the singer's searching lines ask the landscape for answers, while the dactylic rhythmic impulse in the piano foreshadows an unhappy response ('dactylic' is the term for the long-short-short pattern often associated with death and despair in Schubert). While Schumann set dozens of Heine's poems, Schubert's only sustained engagement with his near-contemporary is found within his posthumous compendium *Schwanengesang*: the six Heine songs, of which we hear four today, contain some of his darkest, most bitter utterances in song. The impassioned force of 'Der Atlas' is physically demanding, asking the singer to sustain lines loud, long, and high. There is an unnerving stillness to the portrait of lost love in 'Die Stadt', some respite from which is provided by the gentle, lilting music of 'Das Fischermädchen'. In 'Der Doppelgänger', Schubert seems to have relished the challenge of Heine's intensely psychological poem, with the declamatory vocal writing and eerie piano figuration capturing an almost futuristic sense of musical 'uncanny'.

Arranging folk songs occupied **Benjamin Britten** for decades. His first volume of voice-piano arrangements was made for performance with his partner, the tenor Peter Pears, while both stayed in America as pacifists between 1939 and 1942. The composer reported that the inclusion of a group of arrangements at the end of their song recitals had gone down extremely well, and the practice became a mainstay of the duo's recital programming back in Britain. While it was Pears's voice that – as so often – inspired Britten for his first set of arrangements, subsequent volumes were either written

for, or dedicated to other performers in the couple's creative orbit. The third volume – from which we hear two songs today, along with two from the first set – was dedicated to the soprano Joan Cross; the volume of French songs were for the Swiss soprano Sophie Wyss; and the guitarist Julian Bream and harpist Osian Ellis inspired volumes with the accompaniment given to those instruments instead of piano.

Britten's arrangement of the Welsh tune 'The Ash Grove' (using the version with 19th-century words by Thomas Oliphant) spins intricate accompanimental textures drawn from the tune's triadic and scalar motion. 'The Foggy, Foggy Dew' was collected in many different variants across Southern and Eastern England and in the United States by folklorists including Cecil Sharp, Alan Lomax and Peter Kennedy. While 'The Ash Grove' remembers lost love fondly, this ballad is a cautionary tale of an affair; the piano part is steady and has an air of Schubert in its slightly suggestive off-beats and occasional interjections. 'O Waly, Waly' underscores the expansive vocal line with a repetitive piano figure that gains in intensity as the song's verses progress. Closing the set is the tongue-twisting, upbeat 'Oliver Cromwell', which Britten dedicated to Christopher Mayer, the son of some American friends.

On 18 June 1950, during the third annual Aldeburgh Festival, Pears and Britten gave the first performance of five *Old American Songs* arranged by 'American's leading and most characteristic composer', **Aaron Copland**. The Festival programme also notes that 'the songs were arranged at the instigation of today's performers on their recent tour of the United States'. The two selections heard tonight are both based on 19th-century tunes, and the arrangements are characteristic of Copland's vision for how older music could speak afresh in new guises. 'The Boatmen's Dance' contains striking shifts in pace, with a ponderous refrain set against dance-invoking faster passages, while the luminous piano backdrop for 'Long time ago' enhances the melodiousness of the source song.

The final part of today's concert begins with the melancholic, tender ballad from **Kurt Weill's** 1938 *Knickerbocker Holiday*, 'September Song', which tells that youth and opportunities are fleeting and one should seize them before time runs out. Premiered in 1996, *Ragtime* address themes of race immigration, and class in early 20th-century New York; in 'Make Them Hear You', **Stephen Flaherty's** music underscores a rallying call from the African American protagonist Coalhouse Walker Jr. for stories of injustice and oppression to be told and, above all, heard.

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Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

From *Myrthen* Op. 25 (1840)

Widmung

Friedrich Rückert

Du meine Seele, du mein Herz,
Du meine Wonn', o du mein Schmerz,
Du meine Welt, in der ich lebe,
Mein Himmel du, darein ich schwebe,
O du mein Grab, in das hinab
Ich ewig meinen Kummer gab!
Du bist die Ruh, du bist der Frieden,
Du bist vom Himmel mir beschieden.
Dass du mich liebst, macht mich mir wert,
Dein Blick hat mich vor mir verklärt,
Du hebst mich liebend über mich,
Mein guter Geist, mein bess'res Ich!

Hauptmanns Weib (1840)

Robert Burns, trans. by Wilhelm Gerhard

Hoch zu Pferd!
Stahl auf zartem Leibe,
Helm und Schwert
Ziemen Hauptmanns Weibe.

Tönet Trommelschlag
Unter Pulverdampf,
Siehst du blut'gen Tag
Und dein Lieb im Kampf.

Schlagen wir den Feind,
Küssest du den Gatten,
Wohnst mit ihm vereint
In des Friedens Schatten.

From *Myrtles*

Dedication

You my soul, you my heart,
you my rapture, O you my pain,
you my world in which I live,
my heaven you, in which I float,
O you my grave, into which
my grief forever I've consigned!
You are repose, you are peace,
you are bestowed on me from heaven.
Your love for me gives me my worth,
your eyes transfigure me in mine,
you raise me lovingly above myself,
my guardian angel, my better self!

The Captain's Lady

Mount your horse!
Steel across your tender body,
helmet and sword
become a captain's lady.

When the drums beat
and the powder smokes,
you'll behold a bloody day
and your love in battle.

When the foe is vanquished,
you'll kiss your husband,
you'll live united with him
in the shadow of peace.

Dein Angesicht Op. 127 No. 2 (1840)

Heinrich Heine

Dein Angesicht, so lieb und schön,
Das hab' ich jüngst im Traum gesehn,
Es ist so mild und engelgleich,
Und doch so bleich, so schmerzenreich.

Und nur die Lippen, die sind rot;
Bald aber küsst sie bleich der Tod.
Erlöschen wird das Himmelslicht,
Das aus den frommen Augen bricht.

Your face

Your face so lovely and fair
appeared to me in a recent dream,
so mild, it looks, and angel-like,
and yet so pale, so full of pain.

And your lips alone are red;
but death shall soon kiss them pale.
The heavenly light will be extinguished
that gleams from your innocent eyes.

Die beiden Grenadiere The two grenadiers

Op. 49 No. 1 (1840)

Heinrich Heine

Nach Frankreich zogen zwei Grenadier',
Die waren in Russland gefangen.
Und als sie kamen ins deutsche Quartier,
Sie liessen die Köpfe hangen.

Two grenadiers, held captive in Russia,
were marching back to France,
and when they set foot on German soil,
they hung their heads.

Da hörten sie beide die traurige Mär:
Dass Frankreich verloren gegangen,
Besiegt und geschlagen das tapfere Heer –
Und der Kaiser, der Kaiser gefangen.

For here they learnt the sorry tale
that France was lost forever,
her valiant army beaten and shattered –
and the Emperor, the Emperor captured.

Da weinten zusammen die Grenadier'
Wohl ob der kläglichen Kunde.
Der Eine sprach: Wie weh wird mir,
Wie brennt meine alte Wunde!

The grenadiers then wept together,
as they heard of these sad tidings.
The first said: Ah, the agony,
how my old wound is burning!

Der Andre sprach: Das Lied ist aus
Auch ich möcht mit dir sterben,
Doch hab ich Weib und Kind zu Haus,
Die ohne mich verderben.

The second said: This is the end,
if only we could die together,
but I've a wife and child at home,
who without me would perish.

Was schert mich Weib, was schert mich Kind,
Ich trage weit bess'res Verlangen;
Lass sie bettlen gehn, wenn sie hungrig sind, –
Mein Kaiser, mein Kaiser gefangen!

To hell with wife, to hell with child,
I strive for far higher things;
let them beg, if they are hungry –
my Emperor, my Emperor captured!

Gewähr mir, Bruder, eine Bitt':
Wenn ich jetzt sterben werde,
So nimm meine Leiche nach Frankreich mit,
Begrab' mich in Frankreichs Erde.

Grant me, brother, one request,
if I am now to die,
take my corpse with you to France,
bury me in French soil.

Das Ehrenkreuz am roten Band
Sollst du aufs Herz mir legen;
Die Flinte gib mir in die Hand,
Und gürt' mir um den Degen.

You shall lay on my heart
the Cross of Valour with its red ribbon;
and place my musket in my hand
and gird my sword about me.

So will ich liegen und horchen still.
Wie eine Schildwach', im Grabe,
Bis einst ich höre Kanonengebrüll
Und wiehernder Rosse Getrabe.

So shall I lie and listen
like a silent sentry in my grave,
until I hear the cannons' roar
and the horses gallop and neigh.

Dann reitet mein Kaiser wohl über mein Grab,
Viel Schwerter klirren und blitzen;
Dann steig' ich gewaffnet hervor aus dem Grab, –
Den Kaiser, den Kaiser zu schützen.

My Emperor will then ride over my grave,
swords will be clashing and flashing;
I shall then rise fully armed from the grave –
to defend the Emperor, my Emperor.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Der Wanderer D489 The wanderer

(1816)

Georg Philipp Schmidt von Lübeck

Ich komme vom Gebirge her;
Es dampft das Tal, es braust das Meer,
Ich wandle still, bin wenig froh,
Und immer fragt der Seufzer – wo?

From the mountains I have come,
the valley steams, the ocean roars,
I walk in silence, with little joy,
and my sighs keep asking – Where?

Die Sonne dünkt mich hier so kalt,
Die Blüte welk, das Leben alt;
Und, was sie reden, leerer Schall –
Ich bin ein Fremdling überall.

Here the sun seems so cold,
blossom faded, life old;
what men say – just empty sound:
I am a stranger everywhere.

Wo bist du, mein geliebtes Land!
Gesucht, geahnt, und nie gekannt,
Das Land, das Land, so hoffnungsgrün,
Das Land, wo meine Rosen blüh'n;

Where are you, my beloved land?
Sought for, sensed, and never known,
the land, the land, so green with hope,
the land where my roses bloom;

Wo meine Freunde wandelnd geh'n, Wo meine Toten aufersteh'n, Das Land, das meine Sprache spricht, O Land, wo bist du?	Where my friends roam, where my dead friends rise again, the land that speaks my tongue, O land, where are you?
Ich wandle still, bin wenig froh, Und immer fragt der Seufzer – wo? – Im Geisterhauch tönt's mir zurück, 'Dort, wo du nicht bist, dort ist das Glück!'	I walk in silence, with little joy, and my sighs keep asking – Where? – A ghostly whisper makes reply, 'There, where you are not, there fortune lies!'

**From
Schwanengesang
D957 (1828)**

Der Atlas
Heinrich Heine

Ich unglücksel'ger Atlas! eine Welt, Die ganze Welt der Schmerzen, muss ich tragen, Ich trage Unerträgliches, und brechen Will mir das Herz im Leibe.	I, unfortunate Atlas! a world, the whole world of sorrow I must bear, I bear what cannot be borne, and my heart would break in my body.
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Du stolzes Herz! du hast es ja gewollt! Du wolltest glücklich sein, unendlich glücklich, Oder unendlich elend, stolzes Herz, Und jetzo bist du elend.	You proud heart! you willed it so! You wished to be happy, endlessly happy, or endlessly wretched, proud heart, and now you are wretched.
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Die Stadt
Heinrich Heine

Am fernen Horizonte Erscheint, wie ein Nebelbild, Die Stadt mit ihren Türmen In Abenddämmerung gehüllt.	On the distant horizon the town with its turrets looms like a misty vision, veiled in evening light.
Ein feuchter Windzug kräuselt Die graue Wasserbahn; Mit traurigem Takte rudert Der Schiffer in meinem Kahn.	A dank breeze ruffles the gloomy waterway; with sad and measured strokes the boatman rows my boat.

From Swansong

Atlas

The town

Die Sonne hebt sich noch einmal Leuchtend vom Boden empor, Und zeigt mir jene Stelle, Wo ich das Liebste verlor.	The sun rises once again, gleaming from the earth, and shows me that place where I lost what I loved most.
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Das Fischermädchen
Heinrich Heine

Du schönes Fischermädchen, Treibe den Kahn ans Land; Komm zu mir und setze dich nieder, Wir kosen Hand in Hand.	You lovely fisher maiden, row your boat ashore; come and sit down by my side, hand in hand we'll cuddle.
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Leg' an mein Herz dein Köpfchen, Und fürchte dich nicht zu sehr; Vertraust du dich doch sorglos Täglich dem wilden Meer.	Lay your little head on my heart and don't be too afraid; each day, after all, you trust yourself fearlessly to the raging sea.
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Mein Herz gleicht ganz dem Meere, Hat Sturm und Ebb' und Flut, Und manche schöne Perle In seiner Tiefe ruht.	My heart's just like the sea, it storms and ebbs and floods, and many lovely pearls are resting in its depths.
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Der Doppelgänger
Heinrich Heine

Still ist die Nacht, es ruhen die Gassen, In diesem Hause wohnte mein Schatz; Sie hat schon längst die Stadt verlassen, Doch steht noch das Haus auf demselben Platz.	The night is still, the streets are at rest, this is the house where my loved-one lived; she left the town long ago, but the house still stands in the same place.
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Da steht auch ein Mensch und starrt in die Höhe, Und ringt die Hände, vor Schmerzengewalt; Mir graust es, wenn ich sein Antlitz sehe, – Der Mond zeigt mir meine eigne Gestalt.	A man stands there too, and stares up, wracked with pain, he wrigs his hands; I shudder when I see his face – the moon shows me my own form.
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Du Doppelgänger! du bleicher Geselle! Was äffst du nach mein Liebesleid, Das mich gequält auf dieser Stelle, So manche Nacht, in alter Zeit?	You wraith! You pale companion! Why do you ape the pain of love that tormented me on this same spot, so many nights in times gone by?
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Please do not turn the page until the song and its accompaniment have ended.

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

The Ash Grove from *Vol. 1 British Isles* (1941-2)

Traditional

Down yonder green valley where streamlets meander,
When twilight is fading, I pensively rove,
Or at the bright noontide in solitude wander
Amid the dark shades of the lonely ash grove.
'Twas there while the blackbird was joyfully singing,
I first met my dear one, the joy of my heart;
Around us for gladness the bluebells were ringing,
Ah! then little thought I how soon we should part.

Still glows the bright sunshine o'er valley and mountain,
Still warbles the blackbird his note from the tree,
Still trembles the moonbeam on streamlet and fountain;
But what are the beauties of nature to me?
With sorrow, deep sorrow, my bosom is laden,
All day I go mourning in search of my love.
Ye echoes, O tell me, where is the sweet maiden?
She sleeps 'neath the green turf down by the ash grove.

From *Vol. 3 British Isles* (1945-6)

Traditional

The Foggy, Foggy Dew

When I was a bachelor I lived all alone
And worked at the weaver's trade
And the only, only thing that I ever did wrong,
Was to woo a fair young maid.
I wooed her in the winter time,
And in the summer too...
And the only, only thing I did that was wrong
Was to keep her from the foggy, foggy dew.

One night she came to my bedside
When I lay fast asleep,
She laid her head upon my bed
And she began to weep.
She sighed, she cried, she damn'd near died,
She said: 'What shall I do?'
So I hauled her into bed and I covered up her head,
Just to keep her from the foggy, foggy dew.

Oh, I am a bachelor and I live with my son,
And we work at the weaver's trade.
And ev'ry single time that I look into his eyes,
He reminds me of the fair young maid.
He reminds me of the winter time,
And of the summer too,
And of the many, many times that I held her in my arms,
Just to keep her from the foggy, foggy dew.

O Waly, Waly

The water is wide, I cannot get o'er,
And neither have I wings to fly.
Give me a boat that will carry two,
And both shall row, my love and I.

O, down in the meadows the other day,
A-gath'ring flowers both fine and gay,
A-gath'ring flowers both red and blue,
I little thought what love can do.

I leaned my back up against some oak,
Thinking that he was a trusty tree;
But first he bended and then he broke,
And so did my false love to me.

A ship there is, and she sails the sea,
She's loaded deep as deep can be,
But not so deep as the love I'm in:
I know not if I sink or swim.

O, love is handsome and love is fine,
And love's a jewel while it is new,
But when it is old, it groweth cold,
And fades away like morning dew.

Oliver Cromwell from *Vol. 1 British Isles*

Traditional

Oliver Cromwell lay buried and dead,
Hee-haw, buried and dead,
There grew an old apple-tree over his head,
Hee-haw, over his head.

The apples were ripe and ready to fall,
Hee-haw, ready to fall,
There came an old woman to gather them all,
Hee-haw, gather them all.

Oliver rose and gave her a drop,
Hee-haw, gave her a drop,
Which made the old woman go hippety hop,
Hee-haw, hippety hop.

The saddle and bridle, they lie on the shelf,
Hee-haw, lie on the shelf,
If you want any more you can sing it yourself,
Hee-haw, sing it yourself.

Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

From *Old American Songs I* (1950)

The Boatmen's Dance

Traditional

The boatmen dance, the boatmen sing,
The boatmen up to ev'rything,
And when the boatman gets on shore
He spends his cash and works for more.

*High row the boatmen row,
Floatin' down the river the Ohio.*

Then dance the boatmen dance,
O dance the boatmen dance.
O dance all night 'til broad daylight,
And go home with the gals in the mornin'.

High row the boatmen row...

I went on board the other day
To see what the boatmen had to say.
There I let my passion loose
An' they cram me in the callaboose.
O dance the boatmen dance...

High row the boatmen row...

The boatman is a thrifty man,
There's none can do as the boatman can.
I never see a pretty gal in my life
But that she was a boatman's wife.
O dance the boatmen dance...

High row the boatmen row...

Long time ago

Traditional

On the lake where droop'd the willow
Long time ago,
Where the rock threw back the billow
Brighter than snow.
Dwelt a maid beloved and cherish'd
By high and low,
But with autumn leaf she perished
Long time ago.
Rock and tree and flowing water
Long time ago,
Bird and bee and blossom taught her
Love's spell to know.
While to my fond words she listen'd
Murmuring low,
Tenderly her blue eyes glisten'd
Long time ago.

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Kurt Weill (1900-1950)

September Song from *Knickerbocker Holiday* (1938)

James Maxwell Anderson

When I was a young man courting the girls
I played me a waiting game ...

Stephen Flaherty (b.1960)

Make Them Hear You from *Ragtime* (1996)

Lynn Ahrens

Go out and tell the story
Let it heckle far and wide...