

# WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 14 June 2022 7.30pm

**Roderick Williams** baritone

**Susie Allan** piano

**Arthur Somervell** (1863-1937)

Maud (1898)

*I hate the dreadful hollow • A voice by the cedar tree •  
She came to the village church • O let the solid ground •  
Birds in the high Hall garden • Maud has a garden •  
Go not, happy day • I have led her home •  
Come into the garden, Maud • The fault was mine •  
Dead, long dead • O that 'twere possible •  
My life has crept so long*

Interval

**Gerald Finzi** (1901-1956)

Before and After Summer Op. 16 (c.1932-49)

*Childhood among the Ferns • Before and After Summer •  
The Self-Unseeing • Overlooking the River • Channel Firing •  
In the Mind's Eye • The too short time • Epeisodia • Amabel •  
He abjures love*

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In the 1870s and 1880s, when **Arthur Somervell** was reaching adulthood, the notion of a song recital was still brand new. As the *Liederabend* gradually established itself in Germany and Austria, British audiences were gaining familiarity with the longer song cycles of Schubert, Schumann and others. So Somervell's *Maud*, a cycle to the words of Tennyson, was a cutting-edge contribution to British song on its publication in 1898. The subsequent popularity of Michael William Balfe's sobbingly melodramatic *Come into the Garden*, *Maud* has made it hard to take the scenario very seriously. But it is worth remembering that Tennyson's poetic cycle, published in 1855, shocked and horrified many of his readers even as he professed it to be the work of which he was proudest. The emotional instability of the narrator is even more extreme than familiar song protagonists in Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin* or Schumann's *Dichterliebe* – no wonder Tennyson's Victorian admirers found it hard to take.

We begin with our hero lamenting the suicide of his father, who was ruined by the dealings of his business partner. But the partner has moved into a house nearby, and it his daughter's voice that our protagonist hears 'by the cedar tree' in the second song, and whose eye he catches in the village church in the third. As he falls in love with Maud, we are granted dark glimpses of the future: 'What matter if I go mad?', he asks in the fourth song. Whether the beautiful 16-year-old reciprocates his passion is unclear. Although 'Go not, happy day' suggests that she has consented to be his 'When a happy Yes / Falts from her lips,' Somervell's setting does not point to a joyously decisive moment of shared tenderness. Instead, Maud's words are minimised within the speaker's thoughts on beauty (the landscape's) and happiness (his own).

Tennyson's considerable narrative was too substantial for Somervell to set completely, and he streamlined the plot – sometimes omitting crucial details. Our hero begs her to 'Come into the garden, Maud' because she is at a party that her brother has organised to encourage a more appropriate suitor. Somervell's almost filmic setting leads us from the elegant, twirling waltz of the indoor party to the night-blossoming garden as she ventures to meet him; but this precipitates a duel in which our suitor kills Maud's brother and runs away: 'The fault was mine', he tells us, funeral bells tolling gloomily in the piano's left hand. 'Dead, long dead' is the most remarkable in the cycle, a song of manic madness as he imagines himself dead and buried in such a shallow grave that he still cannot rest. By the cycle's close, Maud too has died, and our protagonist sets off to fight in Crimea – a hero's death, he hopes, just as he once heard his love sing of, by the cedar tree, a lifetime before.

Somervell's career ultimately led him away from full-time composing and into music education, where he worked hard to ensure that music was an integrated part of children's schooling. By the time Somervell died in 1937, **Gerald Finzi** was in his mid-30s and an established composer with a post at the Royal Academy of Music and a string of instrumental works and songs to his name. In particular Finzi found himself drawn to the words of Thomas Hardy, whose poetry he returned to again and again, and with whom he felt a particular emotional and intellectual kinship. The songs of *Before and After Summer* were written over a period of some years – probably from the 1930s through to the cycle's completion in 1949 – and touch on themes dear to both men: the senseless futility of war, the beauty of the natural world and the passing of time.

As the cycle opens, we hear the skies also opening and the first drops of rain falling: a boy in his fern-built den, enjoying both the shelter offered and the eventual reappearance of the sun. But this is, of course, a reminiscence, and both Hardy and Finzi capture with remarkable vividness that sweet moment of the past – and the bitterness to come, the notion of grown 'man' greeted with a heartsore dissonance. The cycle's title-song, 'Before and After Summer', takes us through the year's weather and man's happiest years; whilst 'The Self-Unseeing' and 'Overlooking the River' also take us into the realms of memory, and Hardy berates himself for not realising the preciousness of moments past as they happened.

The mighty 'Channel Firing' conjures with breath-taking shudders the sound of distant guns on the coast – enough to wake the dead, as the thumping, pounding bass of the piano shakes their coffins. Poet and composer speak with one mind as God declares that those men in their graves 'rest eternal sorely need'; though the song closes with those same firing guns that it began, across the ancient sites of southern England.

The ghost of a past lover is shiveringly conjured 'In the Mind's Eye', and a tryst more happily recalled in 'Eepisodia' – though the title implies an interlude in the middle of a tragedy, and clearly there is more to this story than we are told. 'The too short time' returns us to the theme of seasons passing; and in 'Amabel' time passes rather less kindly, as a once-beautiful young woman is pityingly observed to have aged. (The speaker seems entirely unaware that he too may not be the young beauty he once was.) The cycle closes with the tempestuous 'He abjures love', a storm of the highs and lows of passion and romance, until in the final verse the speaker steps away from such things. But what then? For without such heartache and high emotion, life loses its meaning altogether.

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## Arthur Somervell (1863-1937)

### Maud

*Alfred, Lord Tennyson*

### I hate the dreadful hollow

I hate the dreadful hollow behind the little wood;  
Its lips in the field above are dabbled with blood-red heath,  
The red-ribb'd ledges drip with a silent horror of blood,  
An Echo there, whatever is ask'd her, answers 'Death.'

### A voice by the cedar tree

A voice by the cedar tree  
In the meadow under the Hall!  
She is singing an air that is known to me,  
A passionate ballad gallant and gay,  
A martial song like a trumpet's call!  
Singing alone in the morning of life,  
In the happy morning of life and of May.

Singing of men that in battle array,  
Ready in heart and ready in hand,  
March with banner and bugle and fife  
To the death, for their native land.

Maud with her exquisite face,  
And wild voice pealing up to the sunny sky,  
And feet like sunny gems on an English green,  
Maud in the light of her youth and her grace,  
Singing of Death, and of Honor that cannot die,  
Till I well could weep for a time so sordid and mean,  
And myself so languid and base.

Silence, beautiful voice!  
Be still, for you only trouble the mind  
With a joy in which I cannot rejoice,  
A glory I shall not find.  
Still! I will hear you no more,  
For your sweetness hardly leaves me a choice  
But to move to the meadow and fall before  
Her feet on the meadow grass, and adore,  
Not her, who is neither courtly nor kind,  
Not her, not her, but a voice.

### She came to the village church

She came to the village church,  
And sat by a pillar alone;  
An angel watching an urn  
Wept over her, carved in stone;  
And once, but once, she lifted her eyes,  
And suddenly, sweetly, strangely blush'd  
To find they were met by my own.

### O let the solid ground

O, let the solid ground  
Not fail beneath my feet  
Before my life has found  
What some have found so sweet!  
Then let come what come may,  
What matter if I go mad,  
I shall have had my day.

Let the sweet heavens endure,  
Not close and darken above me  
Before I am quite quite sure  
That there is one to love me!  
Then let come what come may  
To a life that has been so sad,  
I shall have had my day.

### Birds in the high Hall garden

Birds in the high Hall garden  
When twilight was falling,  
Maud, Maud, Maud, Maud,  
They were crying and calling.

Where was Maud? in our wood;  
And who else was with her,  
Gathering woodland lilies,  
Myriads blow together.

Birds in our wood sang,  
Ringing thro' the valleys,  
Maud is here, here, here  
In among the lilies.

I kiss'd her slender hand,  
She took the kiss sedately;  
Maud is not seventeen,  
But she is tall and stately.

I know the way she went  
Home with her maiden posy,  
For her feet have touch'd the meadows  
And left the daisies rosy.

### Maud has a garden

Maud has a garden of roses  
And lilies fair on a lawn;  
There she walks in her state  
And tends upon bed and bower,  
And thither I climb'd at dawn  
And stood by her garden-gate.

I heard no sound where I stood  
But the rivulet on from the lawn  
Running down to my own dark wood,  
Or the voice of the long sea-wave as it swell'd  
Now and then in the dim-gray dawn;  
But I look'd, and round, all round the house I beheld  
The death-white curtain drawn,  
Felt a horror over me creep,  
Prickle my skin and catch my breath,  
Knew that the death-white curtain meant but sleep,  
Yet I shudder'd and thought like a fool of the sleep of death.

### Go not, happy day

Go not, happy day,  
From the shining fields,  
Go not happy day,  
Till the maiden yields.  
Rosy is the West,  
Rosy is the South,  
Roses are her cheeks,  
And a rose her mouth.  
When a happy Yes  
Falters from her lips,  
Pass and blush the news  
Over glowing ships;  
Over blowing seas,  
Over seas at rest,  
Pass the happy news,  
Blush it thro' the West;  
Till the red man dance  
By his red cedar-tree,  
And the red man's babe  
Leap, beyond the sea.  
Blush from West to East,  
Blush from East to West,  
Till the West is East,  
Blush it thro' the West.  
Rosy is the West,  
Rosy is the South,  
Roses are her cheeks,  
And a rose her mouth.

### I have led her home

I have led her home, my love, my only friend.  
There is none like her, none.  
And never yet so warmly ran my blood  
And sweetly, on and on  
Calming itself to the long-wish'd-for end,  
Full to the banks, close on the promised good.

None like her, none,  
Just now the dry-tongued laurels' pattering talk  
Seem'd her light foot along the garden walk,  
And shook my heart to think she comes once more.

But even then I heard her close the door;  
The gates of heaven are closed, and she is gone.

### Come into the garden, Maud

Come into the garden, Maud,  
For the black bat, night, has flown,  
Come into the garden, Maud,  
I am here at the gate alone;  
And the woodbine spices are wafted abroad,  
And the musk of the rose is blown.

For a breeze of morning moves,  
And the planet of Love is on high,  
Beginning to faint in the light that she loves  
On a bed of daffodil sky,  
To faint in the light of the sun she loves,  
To faint in his light, and to die.

All night have the roses heard  
The flute, violin, bassoon;  
All night has the casement jessamine stirr'd  
To the dancers dancing in tune;  
Till a silence fell with the waking bird,  
And a hush with the setting moon.

Queen rose of the rosebud garden of girls,  
Come hither, the dancers are done,  
In gloss of satin and glimmer of pearls,  
Queen lily and rose in one;  
Shine out, little head, sunning over with curls,  
To the flowers, and be their sun.

There has fallen a splendid tear  
From a passion-flower at the gate.  
She is coming, my dove, my dear;  
She is coming, my life, my fate.  
The red rose cries, 'She is near, she is near;'  
And the white rose weeps, 'She is late;'  
The larkspur listens, 'I hear, I hear;'  
And the lily whispers, 'I wait.'

She is coming, my own, my sweet;  
Were it ever so airy a tread,  
My heart would hear her and beat,  
Were it earth in an earthy bed;  
My dust would hear her and beat,  
Had I lain for a century dead,  
Would start and tremble under her feet,  
And blossom in purple and red.

### The fault was mine

'The fault was mine, the fault was mine'  
Why am I sitting here so stunn'd and still,  
Plucking the harmless wild-flower on the hill?

It is this guilty hand!  
And there arises ever a passionate cry  
A cry for a brother's blood;  
It will ring in my heart and my ears, till I die, till I die.

## Dead, long dead

Dead, long dead,  
Long dead!  
And my heart is a handful of dust,  
And the wheels go over my head,  
And my bones are shaken with pain,  
For into a shallow grave they are thrust,  
Only a yard beneath the street,  
And the hoofs of the horses beat, beat,  
The hoofs of the horses beat,  
Beat into my scalp and my brain,  
With never an end to the stream of passing feet,  
Driving, hurrying, marrying, burying,  
Clamor and rumble, and ringing and clatter;  
And here beneath it is all as bad,  
For I thought the dead had peace, but it is not so.  
To have no peace in the grave, is that not sad?  
But up and down and to and fro,  
Ever about me the dead men go;  
And then to hear a dead man chatter  
Is enough to drive one mad.  
O me, why have they not buried me deep enough?  
Is it kind to have made me a grave so rough,  
Me, that was never a quiet sleeper?  
Maybe still I am but half-dead;  
Then I cannot be wholly dumb.  
I will cry to the steps above my head  
And somebody, surely, some kind heart will come  
To bury me, bury me  
Deeper, ever so little deeper.

## O that 'twere possible

O that 'twere possible  
After long grief and pain  
To find the arms of my true love  
Round me once again!

## My life has crept so long

My life has crept so long on a broken wing  
Thro' cells of madness, haunts of horror and fear,  
That I come to be grateful at last for a little thing.  
My mood is changed, for it fell at a time of year  
When the face of night is fair on the dewy downs,  
That like a silent lightning under the stars  
She seem'd to divide in a dream from a band of the blest,  
And spoke of a hope for the world in the coming wars  
And it was but a dream yet it yielded a dear delight

To have look'd, tho but in a dream, upon eyes so fair,  
That had been in a weary world my one thing bright;  
And I stood on a giant deck and mixt my breath  
With a loyal people shouting a battle-cry,  
Till I saw the dreary phantom arise and fly  
Far into the North, and battle, and seas of death.  
The blood-red blossom of war with a heart of fire.  
Let it flame or fade, and the war roll down like a wind,  
We have proved we have hearts in a cause, we are noble still.  
I have felt with my native land, I am one with my kind,  
I embrace the purpose of God, and the doom assign'd.

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## Interval

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## Gerald Finzi (1901-1956)

### Before and After Summer Op. 16

*Thomas Hardy*

#### Childhood among the Ferns

I sat one sprinkling day upon the lea,  
Where tall-stemmed ferns spread out luxuriantly,  
And nothing but those tall ferns sheltered me.

The rain gained strength, and damped each lopping frond,  
Ran down their stalks beside me and beyond,  
And shaped slow-creeping rivulets as I conned,

With pride, my spray-roofed house. And though anon  
Some drops pierced its green rafters, I sat on,  
Making pretence I was not rained upon.

The sun then burst, and brought forth a sweet breath  
From the limp ferns as they dried underneath:  
I said: 'I could live on here thus till death';

And queried in the green rays as I sate:  
'Why should I have to grow to man's estate,  
And this afar-noised World perambulate?'

#### Before and After Summer

Looking forward to the spring  
One puts up with anything.  
On this February day  
Though the winds leap down the street,  
Wintry scourgings seem but play,  
And these later shafts of sleet  
—Sharper pointed than the first—  
And these later snows—the worst—  
Are as a half-transparent blind  
Riddled by rays from sun behind.

Shadows of the October pine  
Reach into this room of mine:  
On the pine there swings a bird;  
He is shadowed with the tree.  
Mutely perched he bills no word;  
Blank as I am even is he.  
For those happy suns are past,  
Fore-discerned in winter last.  
When went by their pleasure, then?  
I, alas, perceived not when.

### The Self-Unseeing

Here is the ancient floor,  
Footworn and hollowed and thin,  
Here was the former door  
Where the dead feet walked in.

She sat here in her chair,  
Smiling into the fire;  
He who played stood there,  
Bowing it higher and higher.

Childlike, I danced in a dream;  
Blessings emblazoned that day;  
Everything glowed with a gleam;  
Yet we were looking away!

### Overlooking the River

The swallows flew in the curves of an eight  
Above the river-gleam  
In the wet June's last beam:  
Like little crossbows animate  
The swallows flew in the curves of an eight  
Above the river-gleam.

Planing up shavings of crystal spray  
A moor-hen darted out  
From the bank thereabout,  
And through the stream-shine ripped his way;  
Planing up shavings of crystal spray  
A moor-hen darted out.

Closed were the kingcups; and the mead  
Dripped in monotonous green,  
Though the day's morning sheen  
Had shown it golden and honeybee'd;  
Closed were the kingcups; and the mead  
Dripped in monotonous green.

And never I turned my head, alack,  
While these things met my gaze  
Through the pane's drop-drenched glaze,  
To see the more behind my back ...

O never I turned, but let, alack,  
These less things hold my gaze!

### Channel Firing

That night your great guns, unawares,  
Shook all our coffins as we lay,  
And broke the chancel window-squares,  
We thought it was the Judgment-day

And sat upright. While drearisome  
Arose the howl of wakened hounds:  
The mouse let fall the altar-crumbs,  
The worms drew back into the mounds,

The glebe cow drooled. Till God called, 'No;  
It's gunnery practice out at sea  
Just as before you went below;  
The world is as it used to be:

'All nations striving strong to make  
Red war yet redder. Mad as hatters  
They do no more for Christ's sake  
Than you who are helpless in such matters.

'That this is not the judgment-hour  
For some of them's a blessed thing,  
For if it were they'd have to scour  
Hell's floor for so much threatening ...

'Ha, ha. It will be warmer when  
I blow the trumpet (if indeed  
I ever do; for you are men,  
And rest eternal sorely need).'

So down we lay again. 'I wonder,  
Will the world ever saner be',  
Said one, 'than when He sent us under  
In our indifferent century!'

And many a skeleton shook his head.  
'Instead of preaching forty year,'  
My neighbour Parson Thirdly said,  
'I wish I had stuck to pipes and beer.'

Again the guns disturbed the hour,  
Roaring their readiness to avenge,  
As far inland as Stourton Tower,  
And Camelot, and starlit Stonehenge.

### In the Mind's Eye

That was once her casement,  
And the taper nigh,  
Shining from within there,  
Beckoned, 'Here am I!'

Now, as then, I see her  
Moving at the pane;  
Ah; 'tis but her phantom  
Borne within my brain!—

Foremost in my vision  
Everywhere goes she;  
Change dissolves the landscapes,  
She abides with me.

Shape so sweet and shy, Dear,  
Who can say thee nay?  
Never once do I, Dear,  
Wish thy ghost away.

### The too short time

Nine leaves a minute  
Swim down shakily;  
Each one fain would spin it  
Straight to earth; but, see,  
How the sharp airs win it  
Slantwise away!—Here it say,  
'Now we have finished our summer show  
Of what we knew the way to do:  
Alas, not much! But, as things go,  
As fair as any. And night-time calls,  
And the curtain falls!'

Sunlight goes on shining  
As if no frost were here,  
Blackbirds seem designing  
Where to build next year;  
Yet is warmth declining:  
And still the day seems to say,  
'Saw you how Dame Summer drest?  
Of all God taught her she bethought her!  
Alas, not much! And yet the best  
She could, within the too short time  
Granted her prime.'

### Epeisodia

Past the hills that peep  
Where the leaze is smiling,  
On and on beguiling  
Crisply-cropping sheep;  
Under boughs of brushwood  
Linking tree and tree  
In a shade of lushwood,  
There caressed we!

Hemmed by city walls  
That outshut the sunlight,  
In a foggy dun light,  
Where the footstep falls

With a pit-pat wearisome  
In its cadency  
On the flagstones drearishome  
There pressed we!

Where in wild-winged crowds  
Blown birds show their whiteness  
Up against the lightness  
Of the clammy clouds;  
By the random river  
Pushing to the sea,  
Under bents that quiver  
There shall rest we.

### Amabel

I marked her ruined hues,  
Her custom-straitened views,  
And asked, 'Can there indwell  
My Amabel?'

I looked upon her gown,  
Once rose, now earthen brown;  
The change was like the knell  
Of Amabel.

Her step's mechanic ways  
Had lost the life of May's;  
Her laugh, once sweet in swell,  
Spoilt Amabel.

I mused: 'Who sings the strain  
I sang ere warmth did wane?  
Who thinks its numbers spell  
His Amabel?'—

Knowing that, though Love cease,  
Love's race shows no decrease;  
All find in dorp or dell  
An Amabel.

—I felt that I could creep  
To some housetop, and weep  
That Time the tyrant fell  
Ruled Amabel!

I said (the while I sighed  
That love like ours had died),  
'Fond things I'll no more tell  
To Amabel,

'But leave her to her fate,  
And fling across the gate,  
"Till the Last Trump, farewell,  
O Amabel!"'

## He abjures love

At last I put off love,  
For twice ten years  
The daysman of my thought,  
And hope, and doing;  
Being ashamed thereof,  
And faint of fears  
And desolations, wrought  
In his pursuing,

Since first in youthtime those  
Disquietings  
That heart-enslavement brings  
To hale and hoary,  
Became my housefellows,  
And, fool and blind,  
I turned from kith and kind  
To give him glory.

I was as children be  
Who have no care;  
I did not shrink or sigh,  
I did not sicken;  
But lo, Love beckoned me,  
And I was bare,  
And poor, and starved, and dry,  
And fever-stricken.

Too many times ablaze  
With fatuous fires,  
Enkindled by his wiles  
To new embraces,  
Did I, by wilful ways  
And baseless ires,  
Return the anxious smiles  
Of friendly faces.

No more will now rate I  
The common rare,  
The midnight drizzle dew,  
The gray hour golden,  
The wind a yearning cry,  
The faulty fair,  
Things dreamt, of comelier hue  
Than things beholden! ...

—I speak as one who plumbs  
Life's dim profound,  
One who at length can sound  
Clear views and certain.  
But—after love what comes?  
A scene that lours,  
A few sad vacant hours,  
And then, the Curtain.