

# WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 14 September 2023  
7.30pm

Benjamin Appl baritone  
David Fray piano

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

She never told her love (1794-5)

The Mermaid's Song (1794)

The Spirit's Song (?c.1795)

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Fischerweise D881 (1826)

Auf der Donau D553 (1817)

Nachtstück D672 (1819)

An die Apfelbäume, wo ich Julien erblickte D197 (1815)

Schäfers Klage lied D121 (1814)

An Silvia D891 (1826)

Der Musensohn D764 (1822)

Totengräbers Heimweh D842 (1825)

Der Zwerg D771 (1822-3)

*Interval*

Reynaldo Hahn (1874-1947)

A Chloris (1916)

L'énamourée (?1891)

L'heure exquise from *Chansons grises* (1892)

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Liederkreis Op. 39 (1840)

*In der Fremde • Intermezzo • Waldesgespräch •  
Die Stille • Mondnacht • Schöne Fremde •  
Auf einer Burg • In der Fremde • Wehmut •  
Zwielicht • Im Walde • Frühlingsnacht*

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**Haydn** met the poet Anne Hunter during his first visit to London in 1791. As prominent members of London society, she and her husband, the eminent surgeon Sir John Hunter, would have attended concerts given by the celebrated composer, and Haydn attended Anne's salons at their house in Leicester Square, close by his lodgings in Great Pulteney Street. She was a member of the 'Blue Stockings', a literary society for women (though men were also invited to their meetings) founded around 1750. John died in 1793, leaving Anne a widow by the time of Haydn's second visit to London in 1794-5. The precise nature of their relationship at that time is unclear, but it involved them collaborating to write a series of canzonettas in English. Anne provided the texts for the first set, which includes 'The Mermaid's Song', and she selected the texts for the second set, which includes 'She never told her love', taken from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. 'The Spirit's Song' is one of three separately published canzonettas. John Hunter's collection of anatomical specimens is now the Hunterian Museum in London, which claims to be England's largest public collection of human anatomy.

The nine **Schubert** songs in this programme cover a period of 12 years; the earliest, 'Schäfers Klagelied', was written in 1814 when Schubert was 17, and the latest, 'An Silvia', in July 1826. The opening two songs are set on water, the first untroubled, the second greatly troubled. Both poems are by friends of Schubert: Franz von Schlectha ('Fischerweise') was a civil servant and amateur tenor who took part in many Schubertiades, and Johann Baptist Mayrhofer ('Auf der Donau') was possibly also Schubert's lover. Next come two songs featuring rustling trees; in the first, 'Nachtstück', they comfort a dying man, and in the second, 'An die Apfelbäume', the tree witnesses the awakening of love. The words of this song are by Ludwig Höltz, the only poet in this group who was not a contemporary of Schubert, having died 21 years before Schubert was born. The next three songs continue the love theme; 'An Silvia' is a serenade from Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, translated into German by Schubert's friend Eduard von Bauernfeld. 'Schäfers Klagelied' is thought to be the first Schubert song to be sung at a public concert, by the tenor Franz Jäger, on 28 February 1819 - transposed up a third. The poems of this song and 'Der Musensohn' are by Goethe; a contemporary of Schubert, but he cannot be counted as a friend as he famously disapproved of Schubert (or any other composer) setting his poetry to music. The final two songs centre on death; 'Totengräbers Heimweh' is one of three poems by Craigher that he gave Schubert to set in 1825, and 'Der Zwerg' sets a poem by Matthäus von Collin, a professor of philosophy at the universities of Cracow and Vienna.

**Reynaldo Hahn** was born in Caracas to a Venezuelan mother and a German father. The family moved to Paris when he was age three. He was a child prodigy who entered the Paris Conservatoire at the age of 10; Alfred Cortot and Ravel were among his fellow students in the piano class, and his composition teacher was Gounod. As a conductor, he worked at the Salzburg Festival when it was revived after the First World War, and was described by Maggie Teyte as 'the greatest of all Mozartians'. Most of Hahn's songs date from before 1914, though he lived until 1947. The poem of 'A Chloris' (1916) is by the 17th-century poet and playwright Théophile de Viau, who fell foul of the Jesuits and was charged with heresy (for questioning the immortality of the soul) and immorality (for writing licentious poetry and being bisexual). His plays include *Pyrame et Thisbé*, used by Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The other two songs date from Hahn's teens. 'L'énamourée' was probably composed in 1891 when he was 16 and sets a text by Théodore de Banville, whose bicentenary falls in 2023. Though he achieved success as a poet, Banville had his detractors - one of his obituaries stated that if he had the voice of a nightingale, he also had the brains of one. 'L'heure exquise' was written a year later, one of seven Verlaine settings that make up *Chansons grises*. Verlaine is said to have wept (with joy) on hearing Hahn's settings of his poems.

1840 was **Robert Schumann's** *Liederjahr* ('year of song'), during which he composed 138 songs, written in the frenzy of his love for, and eventual marriage to, Clara Wieck. The *Liederkreis* Op. 39 was written against the background of their long and traumatic struggle to overcome her father's opposition to their relationship. *Liederkreis* was written in May 1840, when their marriage was still uncertain (it would finally take place on 12 September) and the Eichendorff poems that Robert - and probably Clara, too - selected mirror their situation at that time. There are recurring images of a song, or the soul of the poet, flying to the beloved like a bird ('Intermezzo', 'Die Stille', 'Mondnacht'). In 'Wehmut' the nightingale sings of the poet's yearning, and several of the poems speak of the sorrow of solitude and loneliness ('In der Fremde', 'Waldesgespräch'). 'Auf einer Burg' and 'Im Walde' both mention weddings: in both cases clouded by fear and doubt, weeping and shuddering. 'Zwielicht' also reflects uncertainty. However, 'Schöne Fremde' speaks of the certainty of future happiness and *Liederkreis* ends with the triumphant optimism of 'Frühlingsnacht' - a declaration from Clara and Robert that their love will surely overcome every obstacle placed in its path.

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