

WIGMORE HALL 125

Saturday 18 October 2025
1.00pm

Jack Sheen conductor
Eleonore Cockerham soprano
Manchester Camerata

Caroline Pether leader, violin I
William Newell violin II
Alex Mitchell viola
Hannah Roberts cello
Amina Hussain flute
Aine Molines flute, piccolo
Rachael Clegg oboe, cor anglais

Emily Crook clarinet
Dan Bayley clarinet, bass clarinet
Jan Bradley percussion
Lauren Scott harp
Benjamin Powell piano
Sam Rodwell guitar

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

Three Japanese lyrics (1912)
No. 1 Akahito • No. 2 Mazatsumi • No. 3 Tsaraiuki

Isabella Gellis (b.1997)

I wish I could speak to you (2021)

Maurice Delage (1879-1961)

Quatre poèmes hindous (1914)
*Madras: Une belle • Lahore: Une sapin isolé • Bénarès:
Naissance de Bouddha • Jeypur: Si vous pensez à elle*

Jack Sheen (b.1993)

Hollow propranolol séance (II) (2021)

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé (1913)
Soupir • Placet futile • Surgi de la croupe et du bond



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At the heart of this concert is another concert, a feebly attended performance at Paris's Salle Érard on 14 January 1914 organised by the Société Musicale Indépendante. Compared to recent premières in the city, the concert did not shake its listeners into a frenzy; most likely its audience would have been sympathetic friends, colleagues, and curious critics. But this concert hosted the world premières of three of the finest lesser-known works by three of the 20th Century's most fascinating figures. The trio of Stravinsky's *Three Japanese Lyrics*, Delage's *Quatre poèmes hindous* and Ravel's *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* all see song transformed into something experimental and uncanny, yet concentrated and meticulously crafted. All three use an accompanying ensemble of a distilled late-Romantic orchestra, each composer summoning colourful nuances from different chamber arrangements of winds and strings that morph between lushness and transparency.

Whilst taking a sledgehammer to the musical world with *The Rite of Spring*, Stravinsky was also toying with miniatures. His *Lyrics* are the shortest works in this programme, the character of each movement concentrating the rhythmic energy of *The Rite* into fleeting, gritty gems – modernism without excess. The winding, looping melodies of the opening song appear suddenly on stage, disappearing again just as one begins to settle into its strange clock-time. The following two movements similarly elude our grasp, flying around our heads or sinking out of reach. It's music cooked up for immediate seconds.

Delage's *Quatre poèmes hindous* appear softer in voice but equally exploratory. Written after visiting India, they evoke place – *Madras, Lahore, Bénarès, Jeypur* – through luminous drones, modal inflections, and unpredictably winding melodic lines.

I must admit, I still wince when I read some of the *poèmes hindous*. Whenever I reach for the score of this work on my shelf, I feel anxious that its 'Eastern' allusions will feel too dated now, too drenched in exoticism, or – frankly – just too cringe-worthy to put on stage nowadays. But every time I prepare this piece these fears instantly evaporate. This is not an ethnomusicological exercise. Rather than packaging up superficial soundbites for Parisian audiences, Delage used his experiences in India to fundamentally transform his own compositional approach, instigating a restlessly inventive journey through this chamber-orchestral palette and guiding his musical language into new, and – ultimately – imaginary landscapes. The music seems to represent the act of contemplating this compositional process itself, rooted in an inner stillness that provides the framework for mercurial ideas to tendrill out and around themselves.

Ravel's *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* complete this triptych, placing the music in the abstract realm of Mallarmé's symbolist poetry, the first complete edition of which had been published only the year before its première. In my opinion, the *Trois poèmes* are Ravel's greatest achievement, and are some of my favourite

music ever made. So much can be said about them: the glowing harmonies that hover in a cloud and engulf the bittersweet simplicity of the vocal lines; the gestures that abandon melodic legibility in favour of abstract shape. But for me, I am always struck by their pacing. Ravel is constantly instructing his performers to slow down. The music – which already begins in a state of ethereal calm – is stretched and exhausted with the heat of its own technicolour to a nonhuman rate of activity. You leave the music feeling like each atom in your body is vibrating a little slower, and that you are all the richer for it.

What strikes me, listening today, is how these songs manage to be both radical and classical. They dismantle the expansiveness of the most quintessentially Romantic genre – the song – and construct each millisecond of their compositions with a precision that allows for the ideal balance between an unpredictable moment-to-moment experience for the listener, while carving out structures that sit totally complete in themselves by the time you reach the final bar line.

So where now for the song? In a decade where anything goes for the voice, where chart-topping tunes are transformed by auto-tune, seduce us with ASMR close-mic whispers and blow us away with artificial stadium-sized reverb effects, where does this tradition, the one pulled along by Stravinsky, Delage and Ravel, go now?

Perhaps this uncertainty is the most authentic place song can sit. British-Canadian composer Isabella Gellis makes us, all of us – audience and performers – fumble towards song. The arching lines of *I wish I could speak to you* are found at the end of an obstacle course of gently repetitive – bordering on obsessive – tactile gestures, decaying into a murmuring dreamlike wash with the final arrival of the voice. The image depicted in a poem from Dan Sociu's collection *Mouths Dry With Hatred* may feel more domestic and everyday compared to the other texts, yet like Gellis's music's relation to the form of song itself, the words paint a somewhat removed atmosphere – uncertain, suspicious.

I'm not sure my own work, *Hollow propranolol séance (II)* should even be classed as a song. If it is, it seems more like a negative-image of one. The piece started its life as a long-duration installation, it's first iteration – (I) – took place over several hours in an abandoned office block in central Manchester, the performers softly cycling through the music as listeners wandered in and around the cavernous post-industrial space. Compressed here into a concert format, the piece stretches out panels of softly teeming sound, each one attempting to conjure – however fleetingly or ambiguously – some kind of presence out of the fragile whirring that we hear in our empty rooms. Like the piece's attempt to orchestrate physical vacancy, the song-form here is now almost void, flickering in the final moments of the music.

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Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

Three Japanese lyrics (1912)

trans. from Japanese by Aleksandr Nikolayevich Brandt

No. 1 Akahito

Ya belye tsvety v sadu	The flowers in my garden are white,
Tebe khotela pokazat.	you can see.
No sneg poshyol. Ne razobrat,	The snow falls and I cannot
Gde sneg i gde tsvety!	tell one from the other.

No. 2 Mazatsumi

Vesna prishla. Iz treshchin ledyanoy	Spring has come! Through the ice
Kory zaprygali, igraya v rechke	white flowers float,
Pennye struyi: oni khotyat byt	gladly proclaiming
Pervym belym tsvetom	the return of
radostnoy vesny.	spring.

No. 3 Tsaraiuki

Shto eto beloye vdali!	That distant white shimmer, what is it?
Povsyudu, slovno oblaka mezhd u kholmami.	You say it is clouds on the hills,
To vishni raztsveli;	but the cherries are in bloom,
Prishla zhelannaya vesna.	it is our beloved springtime!

Isabella Gellis (b.1997)

I wish I could speak to you (2021)

Dan Sociu

I wish I could speak to you tenderly
as if the windows of our house
overlooked the sea
and we could spend our days
gazing at each other
in the evening you'd paint
or weave
our friends would come to our place
swimming
and our organs
would have completely forgotten
their fascist activities
our life would be purer
like a butcher knife
just wiped clean

Maurice Delage (1879-1961)

Quatre poèmes hindous (1914)

Madras: Une belle *Bhartrihari*

Une belle à la taille
svelte
Se promène sous les arbres
de la forêt,
En se reposant de temps en
temps.
Ayant relevé de la main
Les trois voiles d'or
Qui lui couvre les seins,
Elle renvoie à la
lune
Les rayons dont elle était
baignée.

Madras: A beautiful woman

A beautiful woman, with a
slim waist,
walks beneath the forest
trees,
halting to rest from time
to time.
Lifting with her hand
the three golden veils
that cover her breasts,
she reflects back to the
moon
the rays in which she was
bathed.

Lahore: Une sapin isolé *Heinrich Heine*

Un sapin isolé se dresse sur
une montagne
Aride du Nord. Il
sommeille.
La glace et la neige l'environne
D'un manteau blanc.

Lahore: A lonely fir- tree

A lonely fir-tree stands on
a mountain's
Barren northern heights.
And drowns.
Ice and snow envelop it
In a white blanket.

Il rêve d'un palmier qui là-
bas
Dans l'Orient lointain se
désole,
Solitaire et taciturne,
Sur la pente de son rocher
brûlant.

It dreams of a palm-tree
which grieves
Far away in the distant
East,
Solitary and silent
On a blazing rocky
wall.

*Please do not turn the page until the song and its
accompaniment have ended.*

Bénarès: Naissance de Bouddha

Benares: The birth of Buddha

Anonymous

En ce temps-là fut annoncé	It was then that the coming of Buddha
La venue de Bouddha sur la terre.	was announced on earth.
Il se fit dans le ciel un grand bruit de nuages.	The sky filled with a great clamour of clouds.
Les Dieux, agitant leurs éventails et leurs vêtements,	The Gods, flourishing their fans and robes,
Répandirent d'innombrables fleurs merveilleuses.	scattered innumerable marvellous flowers.
Des parfums mystérieux et doux se croisèrent	Mysterious and sweet scents intermingled
Comme des lianes dans le souffle tiède de cette nuit de printemps.	like creepers in the warm breath of that spring night.
La perle divine de la pleine lune	The sacred pearl of the full moon
S'arrêta sur le palais de marbre,	hung above the marble palace,
Gardé par vingt mille éléphants,	guarded by twenty thousand elephants,
Pareils à des collines grises de la couleur de nuages.	like grey hills the colour of clouds.

Jeypur: Si vous pensez à elle

Jaipur: If you think of her

Bhartrihari

Si vous pensez à elle,	If you think of her,
Vous éprouvez un douloureux tourment.	you feel an aching torment.
Si vous la voyez,	If you see her,
Votre esprit se trouble.	you grow distracted.
Si vous la touchez,	If you touch her,
Vous perdez la raison.	you lose your reason.
Comment peut-on l'appeler bien-aimée?	How can you call her beloved?

Jack Sheen (b.1993)

Hollow propranolol séance (II) (2021)

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

3 Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé (1913)

Stéphane Mallarmé

Soupir	Sigh
Mon âme vers ton front où rêve, ô calme sœur,	My soul rises toward your brow where, calm sister,
Un automne jonché de taches de rousseur,	an autumn strewn with russet spots is dreaming,
Et vers le ciel errant de ton œil angélique	and toward the restless sky of your angelic eye,
Monte, comme dans un jardin mélancolique,	as in some melancholy garden
Fidèle, un blanc jet d'eau soupire vers l'Azur!	a white fountain faithfully sighs toward the Azure!
– Vers l'Azur attendri d'Octobre pâle et pur	– Toward the tender Azure of pale and pure October
Qui mire aux grands bassins sa langueur infinie	that mirrors its infinite languor in the vast pools,
Et laisse, sur l'eau morte où la fauve agonie	and, on the stagnant water where the tawny agony
Des feuilles erre au vent et creuse un froid sillon,	of leaves wanders in the wind and digs a cold furrow,
Se traîner le soleil jaune d'un long rayon.	lets the yellow sun draw itself out in one long ray.

Placet futile	Futile supplication
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Princesse! à jalouser le destin d'une Hébé	Princess! In envying the fate of a Hebe
Qui poind sur cette tasse au baiser de vos lèvres,	who appears on this cup at the kiss of your lips,
J'use mes feux mais n'ai rang discret que d'abbé	I expend my ardour but have only the modest rank of abbé
Et ne figurerai même nu sur le Sèvres.	and shall not figure even naked on the Sèvres.
Comme je ne suis pas ton bichon embarbé,	Since I am not your bearded lap-dog,
Ni la pastille ni du rouge, ni jeux mièvres	nor lozenge, nor rouge, nor affected games,
Et que sur moi je sais ton regard clos tombé,	and know you look on me with indifferent eyes,
Blonde dont les coiffeurs divins sont des orfèvres!	blonde, whose divine coiffeurs are goldsmiths –
Nommez-nous ... toi de qui tant de ris framboisés	Appoint me ... you whose many laughs like raspberries
Se joignent en troupeau d'agneaux apprivoisés	are gathered among flocks of docile lambs
Chez tous broutant les vœux et bêlant aux délires,	grazing through all vows and bleating at all frenzies,

Nommez-nous ... pour	Appoint me ... so that
qu'Amour ailé d'un éventail	Love winged with a fan
M'y peigne flûte aux	may paint me there,
doigts endormant ce	fingering a flute and
bercail,	lulling this fold,
Princesse, nommez-nous	Princess, appoint me
berger de vos sourires.	shepherd of your smiles.

Surgi de la croupe et du bond

Risen from the crupper and leap

Surgi de la croupe et du	Risen from the crupper
bond	and leap
D'une verrerie	of an ephemeral
éphémère	ornament of glass,
Sans fleurir la veillée	without garlanding the
amère	bitter vigil,
Le col ignore	the neglected neck stops
s'interrompt.	short.

Je crois bien que deux	I truly believe that two
bouches n'ont	mouths never
Bu, ni son amant ni ma	drank, neither her lover
mère,	nor my mother,
Jamais à la même Chimère,	from the same Chimera,
Moi, sylphe de ce froid	I, sylph of this cold
plafond!	ceiling!

Le pur vase d'aucun	The vase pure of any
breuvage	draught
Que l'inexhaustible	save inexhaustible
veuvage	widowhood
Agonise mais ne	though dying does not
consent,	consent –

Naïf baiser des plus	Naive and most funereal
funèbres!	kiss –
A rien expirer	to breathe forth any
annonçant	annunciation
Une rose dans les ténèbres.	of a rose in the shadows.