

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 1 December 2023
1.00pm

Sir Willard White at Christmas

Sir Willard White bass-baritone
Eugene Asti piano

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)	An Silvia D891 (1826)
Roger Quilter (1877-1953)	Come away, Death Op. 6 No. 1 (1905)
Samuel Barber (1910-1981)	Sure on this Shining Night Op. 13 No. 3 (1938) Promiscuity from <i>Hermit Songs</i> Op. 29 (1952-3)
Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)	From <i>Songs of Travel</i> (1901-4) The vagabond • Bright is the ring of words
Aaron Copland (1900-1990)	From <i>Old American Songs I</i> (1950) The dodger • Simple Gifts • I Bought me a Cat
Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990)	From <i>Peter Pan</i> (1950) Who am I? • My House
Richard Rodgers (1902-1979)	From <i>South Pacific</i> (1949) Some Enchanted Evening • This Nearly Was Mine If I Loved You from <i>Carousel</i> (1945)
Spiritual	Deep River <i>arranged by Carl Davis</i> Go Tell It on the Mountain <i>arranged by Margaret Bonds</i>
Trad/West Indian	The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy <i>arranged by Randa Kirshbaum</i>
Spiritual	This Little Light Of Mine <i>arranged by Carl Davis</i>



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Shakespeare has long been a rich source of inspiration for musicians and it is two settings of songs from his comedies that open today's programme. First is **Schubert's** 'An Silvia', a setting of a (rather loose) German translation of 'Who is Sylvia?' from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Composed in July 1826, it has all the hallmarks of mature Schubert – here in merry mood. At the centre is the question of whether fair Sylvia is as a kind as she is beautiful, and through the close interplay of rustic piano writing and a somewhat languid vocal line we discover she has 'excelled every grace that this earth can bestow'.

The second setting, despite its comedic origins, strikes a different mood. 'Come away, Death' is sung by the fool Feste in *Twelfth Night* and tells of unrequited love and a young man 'slain by a fair cruel maid' who wishes to be buried far away, where no tears can mourn him. **Quilter** was a keen Shakespearian and included it in his *3 Shakespeare Songs* of 1905. Lyrical, reflective, and with a distinctive lilt, his sensitivity to text and colour in the setting points to why his many songs remain such a firm fixture of English art song repertoire.

Quilter's prolific output was matched by **Barber**, whose own works for voice and piano number over 100. The poignant and aching 'Sure on this Shining Night' – complete with pulsating piano accompaniment – draws on a text by James Agee, a writer Barber would return to for his nostalgic *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*. The later *Hermit Songs* (1952-3) saw him turn away from modern texts, looking instead to the 8th to 10th centuries. Inspired by translations of poems from that period, he wrote to his uncle, the composer Sidney Homer: 'These were extraordinary men, monks or hermits or what not, and they wrote these little poems on the corners of MSS [manuscripts] they were illuminating or just copying. I find them very direct, unspoiled and often curiously contemporaneous in feeling.' There is a notable sparseness to the declamatory, but strikingly brief, 'Promiscuity', the seventh of the collection.

A boldness of delivery also defines the wanderer of **Vaughan Williams's** *Songs of Travel*. Composed between 1901 and 1904, the cycle features nine settings of Robert Louis Stevenson poems commenting on love, loss and man's relationship to nature and art. The Romantic models are clear, with the strident poet of the opening 'The Vagabond', traversing the English countryside to an *alla marcia* piano bassline. A similar sense of purpose can be found at the start of 'Bright is the ring of words', though this consideration of art enduring after the artist is gone turns tender in the wake of death; spread chords provide an almost shimmering accompaniment. Premiered at Wigmore (then Bechstein) Hall in December 1904, the cycle was a major success for Vaughan Williams and an early work incorporating his then newfound interest in folk music.

Copland also looked to the traditional music of his homeland, and it was in 1950, while writing *12 Poems of Emily Dickinson*, he took a break and completed his first volume of *Old American Songs*. Comprising five songs, the collection includes the 1884 political campaign number 'The Dodger' – set to an accompaniment referencing banjo playing – and the raucous animal-sound-packed 'I Bought Me a Cat', a children's song Copland learnt from Lynn Riggs (the author of the play on which Rodgers and Hammerstein based *Oklahoma!*). The Shaker tune 'Simple Gifts' is also present. It had occupied an important place in Copland's ballet *Appalachian Spring* (1944), but in revisiting it as a song, he highlighted the simplicity of the melody, setting an unadorned and unpretentious vocal line over a hymn-like piano part.

And so to Broadway. The same year Copland was setting his *Old American Songs*, **Bernstein** was writing incidental music for a new production of JM Barrie's *Peter Pan*. Already a successful composer for the stage, having had a hit with *On the Town* in 1944, Bernstein's role in *Peter Pan* was ultimately small; it opened on 24 April 1950 with five songs, two pirate choruses, and some orchestral music. The *New York Times* critic Brooks Atkinson was nevertheless impressed, remarking on how Bernstein had composed a 'melodic, colourful and dramatic score that is not afraid to be simple in spirit.' The songs, including 'Who am I?' and 'My House', exemplify Bernstein's ability to capture the childlike quality of the characters and the story.

As *Peter Pan* was playing at the Imperial Theatre, *South Pacific* was but one block away at the Majestic. Following *Oklahoma!* (1943), *Carousel* (1945) and *Allegro* (1947), it was **Rodgers** and Hammerstein's fourth professional stage collaboration, receiving 1,925 performances and running from 1949 to 1954. 'Some Enchanted Evening' and 'This Nearly Was Mine' are both love songs sung by leading man Emile de Becque, while 'If I Loved You' is the equivalent in the earlier *Carousel*. All are quintessential Rodgers and Hammerstein: soaring, wistful and memorable.

It is the theme of hope that comes to the fore in the **Spirituals** that close the programme. With their origins in the oral traditions of African American enslaved communities, Spirituals became a feature of concert stages from the 1860s and reached ever wider audiences through composer-performers like **Margaret Bonds** promoting them among classical singers in the 20th Century. 'Go Tell It on the Mountain' – arranged by Bonds – and 'The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy', first documented in Edric Connor's 1945 *West Indian Spirituals and Folk Tunes*, both find inspiration in the nativity. The final number, 'This Little Light of Mine', is a Christmas favourite that since the 1960s has also found meaning as a song of resistance.

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Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

An Silvia D891 (1826)

William Shakespeare, trans.

Eduard von Bauernfeld

Was ist Silvia, saget an,
Dass sie die weite Flur
preist?
Schön und zart seh' ich sie
nah'n,
Auf Himmels Gunst und Spur
weist,
Dass ihr Alles untertan.

Ist sie schön und gut dazu?
Reiz labt wie milde
Kindheit;
Ihrem Aug' eilt Amor zu,
Dort heilt er seine Blindheit,
Und verweilt in süsser Ruh.

Darum Silvia, tön', o
Sang,
Der holden Silvia Ehren;
Jeden Reiz besiegt sie
lang,
Den Erde kann gewähren:
Kränze ihr und
Saitenklang!

To Sylvia

What is Sylvia, tell me,
that the wide fields praise
her?
I see her draw near,
delicate and fair,
it is a mark of heaven's
favour
that all are subject to her.

Is she fair and kind as well?
Her gentle child-like
charm refreshes;
Cupid hastens to her eyes,
is cured of blindness there,
and lingers in sweet peace.

To Sylvia, then, let our
song resound,
in sweetest Sylvia's honour;
she's long excelled every
grace
that this earth can bestow:
bring her garlands and
the sound of strings!

Roger Quilter (1877-1953)

Come away, Death Op. 6 No. 1 (1905)

William Shakespeare

Come away, come away, death,
And in sad cypress let me be laid.
Fly away, fly away, breath;
I am slain by a fair cruel maid.
My shroud of white, stuck all with yew,
O, prepare it!
My part of death, no one so true
Did share it.

Not a flower, not a flower sweet,
On my black coffin let there be strown.
Not a friend, not a friend greet
My poor corpse, where my bones shall be thrown.
A thousand thousand sighs to save,
Lay me, O, where
Sad true lover never find my grave,
To weep there!

Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

Sure on this Shining Night Op. 13 No. 3

(1938)

James Agee

Sure on this shining night
Of star-made shadows round,
Kindness must watch for me
This side the ground.

The late year lies down the north.
All is healed, all is health.
High summer holds the earth.
Hearts all whole.

Sure on this shining night
I weep for wonder wand'ring far alone
Of shadows on the stars.

Promiscuity from *Hermit Songs* Op. 29 (1952-3)

9th century

I do not know with whom Edan will sleep,
But I do know that fair Edan will not sleep alone.

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

From *Songs of Travel* (1901-4)

Robert Louis Stevenson

The vagabond

Give to me the life I love,
Let the lave go by me,
Give the jolly heaven above,
And the byway nigh me.
Bed in the bush with stars to see,
Bread I dip in the river -
There's the life for a man like me,
There's the life for ever.

Let the blow fall soon or late,
Let what will be o'er me;
Give the face of earth around,
And the road before me.
Wealth I seek not, hope nor love,
Nor a friend to know me;
All I seek, the heaven above,
And the road below me.

Or let autumn fall on me
Where afield I linger,
Silencing the bird on tree,
Biting the blue finger.
White as meal the frosty field—
Warm the fireside haven—
Not to autumn will I yield,
Not to winter even!

Let the blow fall soon or late...

Bright is the ring of words

Bright is the ring of words
When the right man rings them,
Fair the fall of songs
When the singer sings them,
Still they are carolled and said -
On wings they are carried -
After the singer is dead
And the maker buried.

Low as the singer lies
In the field of heather,
Songs of his fashion bring
The swains together.
And when the west is red
With the sunset embers,
The lover lingers and sings
And the maid remembers.

Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

From *Old American Songs I* (1950)

The dodger

Traditional

Yes the candidate's a dodger,
Yes a well-known dodger.
Yes the candidate's a dodger,
Yes and I'm a dodger too.

He'll meet you and treat you,
And ask you for your vote.
But look out boys,
He's a-dodgin' for your note.

Yes we're all dodgin'
A-dodgin', dodgin', dodgin'.
Yes we're all dodgin'
Out away through the world.

Yes the preacher he's a dodger,
Yes a well-known dodger.
Yes the preacher he's a dodger,
Yes and I'm a dodger too.

He'll preach you a gospel,
And tell you of your crimes.
But look out boys,
He's a-dodgin' for your dimes.

Yes we're all dodgin' ...

Yes the lover he's a dodger,
Yes a well-known dodger.
Yes the lover he's a dodger,
Yes and I'm a dodger too.

He'll hug you and kiss you,
And call you his bride,
But look out girls,
He's a-tellin' you a lie.

Yes we're all dodgin' ...

Simple Gifts

attr. Joseph Brackett

'Tis the gift to be simple,
'Tis the gift to be free,
'Tis the gift to come down
Where you ought to be,
And when we find ourselves
In the place just right,
It will be in the valley
Of love and delight.

When true
Simplicity is gained,
To bow and to bend,
We shan't be ashamed.
To turn, turn,
Will be our delight,
'Til by turning, turning,
We come round right.

'Tis the gift to be simple,
'Tis the gift to be free ...

I Bought me a Cat

Traditional

I bought me a cat, my cat pleased me
I fed my cat under yonder tree
My cat says fiddle eye fee.

I bought me a duck, my duck pleased me
I fed my duck under yonder tree
My duck says 'Quaa, quaa'
My cat says fiddle eye fee.

I bought me a goose, my goose pleased me
I fed my goose under yonder tree
My goose says 'Quaw, quaw'
My duck says ...

I bought me a hen, my hen pleased me
I fed my hen under yonder tree
My hen says 'Shimmy shack, shimmy shack'
My goose says ...

I bought me a pig, my pig pleased me
I fed my pig under yonder tree
My pig says 'Griffey, griffey'
My hen says ...

I bought me a cow, my cow pleased me
I fed my cow under yonder tree
My cow says 'Moo, moo'
My pig says ...

I bought me a horse, my horse pleased me
I fed my horse under yonder tree
My horse says 'Neigh, neigh'
My cow says ...

I bought me a wife, my wife pleased me
I fed my wife under yonder tree
My wife says 'Honey, honey'
My horse says 'Neigh, neigh'
My cow says 'Moo, moo'
My pig says 'Griffey, griffey'
My hen says 'Shimmy shack, shimmy shack'
My goose says 'Quaw, quaw'
My duck says 'Quaa, quaa'
My cat says fiddle eye fee.

Due to copyright reasons, we are unable to reproduce the lyrics to the following five songs.

Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990)

From *Peter Pan* (1950)

Who am I? (1950)

Leonard Bernstein

Funny, the thoughts I have at night
So different from the thoughts I have by day ...

My House (1950)

Leonard Bernstein

Will you build me a house?
A house that really will be mine! ...

Richard Rodgers (1902-1979)

From *South Pacific* (1949)

Some Enchanted Evening (1949)

Oscar Hammerstein II

Some enchanted evening, you may see a stranger,
You may see a stranger across a crowded room ...

This Nearly Was Mine (1949)

Oscar Hammerstein II

One dream in my heart,
One love to be living for ...

If I Loved You from *Carousel* (1945)

Oscar Hammerstein II

If I loved you,
Time and again I would try to say ...

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

Spiritual

Deep River

arranged by Carl Davis

Traditional

Deep river,
My home is over Jordan
Deep river, Lord;
I wanna cross over into Camp ground.

Oh, don't you wanna go to that Gospel feast
That Promised Land, that land where all is peace?

Oh, deep river,
My soul is over Jordan
Deep river, Lord,
I wanna cross over into Camp ground.

Go Tell It on the Mountain

arranged by Margaret Bonds

Traditional

Go tell it on the mountain
Over the hills and everywhere,
Go tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born.

While shepherds kept their watching
O'er silent flocks by night,
Behold! Throughout the the heavens
There shone a holy light.

Go tell it on the mountain...

The shepherds feared and trembled
When lo! Above the earth
Rang out the angel chorus
That hailed our Saviour's birth.

Go tell it on the mountain...

Down in a lowly manger
Our humble Christ was born
And brought us all salvation
That blessed Christmas morn.

Go tell it on the mountain...

Trad/West Indian

The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy

arranged by Randa Kirshbaum

Traditional

The Virgin Mary had a baby boy,
The Virgin Mary had a baby boy,

The Virgin Mary had a baby boy,
And they said that His name was Jesus.

He come from the glory,
He come from the glorious kingdom.
Oh yes, believer.

The angels sang when the baby was born,
The angels sang when the baby was born,
The angels sang when the baby was born,
And they said that His name was Jesus.

He come from the glory...

The shepherds came where the baby was born,
The shepherds came where the baby was born,
The shepherds came where the baby was born,
And they said that His name was Jesus.

He come from the glory...

The wise men came where the baby was born,
The wise men came where the baby was born,
The wise men came where the baby was born,
And they said that His name was Jesus.

He come from the glory...

Spiritual

This Little Light Of Mine

arranged by Carl Davis

Traditional

This little light of mine,
I'm going to let it shine.
This little light of mine,
I'm going to let it shine.
This little light of mine,
I'm going to let it shine.
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Everywhere I go,
I'm going to let it shine ...
Let it shine, let it shine, O let it shine.

All through the night,
I'm going to let it shine ...
Let it shine, let it shine, O let it shine.

Let it shine, let it shine!

Translation of Schubert by Richard Stokes from The Book of Lieder published by Faber & Faber, with thanks to George Bird, co-author of The Fischer-Dieskau Book of Lieder, published by Victor Gollancz Ltd. 'Sure on this shining night' Words by James Agee, Music by Samuel Barber © Copyright 1941 (Renewed) G. Schirmer Incorporated. All Rights Reserved. International Copyright Secured. Words by James Agee, printed with kind permission of The Wylie Agency LLC.