

WIGMORE HALL 125

Monday 1 December 2025
1.00pm

Hiroshi Amako tenor
Michael Pandya piano

Stephen Hough (b.1961)
Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Osamu Katsuki (b.1948)
Benjamin Britten
Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Benjamin Britten

Tōru Tamura (b.1938)
Benjamin Britten
Stephen Hough

Benjamin Britten
Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992)
Benjamin Britten

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)
Franz Schubert (1797-1828)
Benjamin Britten

Frank Bridge (1879-1941)
Paul Hindemith (1895-1963)
Benjamin Britten

John Weldon (1676-1736)

Transformation from *Songs from Isolation* (2020)
Oh my black Soule! from *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*
Op. 35 (1945)
Pram (1974)
Batter my heart from *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* Op. 35
In the black, dismal dungeon of despair Z190 (pub. 1688) realised
by Benjamin Britten
Oh might those sighes and teares from *The Holy Sonnets of*
John Donne Op. 35
When the wind blows (1938)
Oh, to vex me from *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* Op. 35
Hotel from *Songs from Isolation*

What if this present from *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* Op. 35
Paysage from *Poèmes pour Mi* (1936)
Since she whom I loved from *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*
Op. 35

The Call from *5 Mystical Songs* (1911)
Auflösung D807 (1824)
At the round earth's imagined corners from *The Holy Sonnets*
of John Donne Op. 35
Journey's End (1925)
Wie Sankt Franciscus schweb' ich in der Luft (1920)
From *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* Op. 35
Thou hast made me • Death, be not proud
Alleluia realised by Benjamin Britten



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‘Through love, all that is acrid will turn sweet.’ So begins the opening phrase of **Stephen Hough’s** *Songs of Isolation*, a collection of pieces written during the COVID-19 pandemic, with text adapted from the words of the 13th-century Persian poet, Rumi. Themes of transformation and yearning for the divine are the golden threads that connect the songs in today’s adventurous programme. In Hough’s unaccompanied song, the alchemy of Rumi’s mystical words is reflected in wonder-struck, major-minor vocal writing. (‘Hotel’, from the same collection, is performed later in the programme with piano accompaniment – due to the work’s lockdown origins, all songs in the cycle are written for piano and voice, but can be performed solo or together).

For tenor Hiroshi Amako and pianist Michael Pandya, the sparsity of this opening gesture is deliberate: it paves the way for **Benjamin Britten’s** nine *Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, the richly expressive, but highly demanding central work around which today’s programme is built. Amako acknowledges the complexity of the Sonnets, saying: ‘I’ve always wanted to perform them because they’re so powerful and they hold so much emotion, but Donne’s command of the English language is so complex that the songs can be quite difficult to understand on first hearing. We had the idea of splitting them up with various other songs that echo the *Sonnets’* themes, in order to make them a little easier to digest.’

Benjamin Britten composed the Sonnets in 1945, fresh from the success of his opera *Peter Grimes* that same year, yet reeling from horrors of the Second World War. Britten had spent the War in America, in self-imposed exile as a conscientious objector. Upon his return, he and the violinist Yehudi Menuhin travelled to the recently-liberated Auschwitz concentration camp, and struggled to put into words what he had witnessed there.

Pianist Michael Pandya explains that the order in which the *Sonnets* are set creates a profound narrative arc: ‘They’re not in the order that John Donne wrote them; they’re organised to create something that’s very, very bleak at the beginning. It then takes us into acceptance and grief, before something that evokes the overcoming of death, however we might choose to interpret that in our own time.’ The sense of darkness and self-loathing is especially apparent in the fatalistic piano heartbeat of ‘Oh my blacke Soule!’, while ‘She whom I loved’, a setting of a 1617 Sonnet in which Donne laments the death of his cherished wife, is a startlingly moving evocation of loss and love. ‘Death, be not proud’ begins with a sombre passacaglia (a 17th-century musical form characterised by a repeating baseline, over which a series of melodic variations unfold), before negating the idea of death, paradoxically, in eternal life.

Amako is proud to pay homage to his Japanese roots in two songs which allude to what he describes as ‘accompanying presences’ in our lives, whether

religious or otherwise. ‘I’ve lived most of my life in the UK, but I was born in Japan and I lived there until I was eight,’ he explains. ‘This is my way of connecting to my roots.’ The first Japanese song, which translates as *Pram*, is written by **Osamu Katsuki**, and is a setting of a melancholy poem by a 20th-century poet, Tatsuji Miyoshi, in which a baby implores its mother to push them down a never-ending road, as petals and leaves fall around them. **Tōru Tamura’s** *When the wind blows* is a setting of a 12th-century *Tanka* 短歌 (a short poem) by Fujiwara no Tadamichi. It features a delicate, swirling piano part that underpins a lyrical, sustained vocal line, evoking the beauty of a moonlit field.

Elsewhere, the programme plunges deeper into the Sonnets’ wide-ranging themes. Britten’s setting of **Henry Purcell’s** song, *In the black, dismal dungeon of despair*, is a setting of a late 17th-century devotional text by Bishop William Fuller, in which the poet dwells on his past sins and prays for redemption, with music that conjures shadows from depths of the piano, before the vocal line ascends with urgency and passion. **Olivier Messiaen’s** ‘Paysage’ from the song cycle *Poèmes pour Mi* was originally composed for soprano and orchestra in 1936. In the 1937 version for piano and voice, the singer begins with a swooning phrase that we hear three times – ‘le lac, comme un gros bijou bleu’ (‘the lake, like a big blue jewel’) – before retreating, as if exhausted, to a single-note incantation, which the piano showers with chromatic harmonies.

There is a folksong-like innocence to ‘The Call’ from **Ralph Vaughan Williams’s** *5 Mystical Songs*. The text was written by the 17th-century Welsh poet and Anglican priest George Herbert, and despite Vaughan Williams’s own atheism at the time of the songs’ composition (1911), there is a radiance and joy to this lilting song of devotion. **Schubert’s** *Auflösung* (‘Dissolution’) continues the programme’s shift towards more rapturous terrain, with its trembling piano arpeggios and a surging, soaring vocal line. Written in 1925, *Journey’s End*, **Frank Bridge’s** last ever song composition, strikes a more anguished, doubting tone, as the singer contemplates their solitude in the hour of death, accompanied by discordant, halting figures in the piano part.

Paul Hindemith’s setting of Christophe Morgenstern’s text, *Wie Sankt Franciscus schweb’ ich in der Luft*, depicts a soul departing the earth, with a fanfare-like, martial piano accompaniment whose rhythmic play-out recalls echoing lines of plainchant. To end the concert, Amako and Pandya have chosen Britten’s elegant adaption of yet another 17th-century song: **John Weldon’s** *Alleluia*, an ornate, virtuosic hymn of praise accompanied by rich counterpoint in the keyboard. Unburdened from fear and earthly struggles, and following in the wake of the *Sonnets*, it marks the culmination of a truly transformative musical journey.

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Stephen Hough (b.1961)

Transformation from *Songs from Isolation* (2020)

Rumi, adapted by Stephen Hough

Through Love, all that is acrid will turn sweet.
Through Love, all that is dross will change to gold.
Through Love, dregs will transform to purest wine.
Through Love, all pangs will turn into a balm.
Through Love, the dead will rise to life again.
Through Love, the king will change into a serf.

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Oh my black Soule! from *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne Op. 35* (1945)

John Donne

Oh my blacke Soule! now thou art summoned
By sicknesse, death's herald, and champion;
Thou art like a pilgrim, which abroad hath done
Treason, and durst not turne to whence hee is fled,
Or like a thiefe, which till death's doome be read,
Wisheth himselfe deliver'd from prison;
But dam'd and hal'd to execution,
Wisheth that still he might be imprisoned.
Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lacke;
But who shall give thee that grace to beginne?
Oh make thyselfe with holy mourning blacke,
And red with blushing, as thou are with sinne;
Or wash thee in Christ's blood, which hath this might
That being red, it dyes red soules to white.

Osamu Katsuki (b.1948)

Pram (1974)

Tatsuji Miyoshi

Mother –
As something pale, saddening,
And Hydrangea-coloured falls,
The gentle wind blows through the never-ending shade
of the tree-lined path,

In the twilight hours,
Mother – push my pram;
Push my rattling pram
Towards the tear-strewn sunset.

Place on my cold forehead
My velvet green hat with a red tassel;
Even for the migrating birds
The seasons pass across the sky.

As something pale, saddening,
And hydrangea-coloured falls on the road,
Mother, I know this –
This will be a long, long, never-ending road.

Benjamin Britten

Batter my heart from *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne Op. 35*

John Donne

Batter my heart, three person'd God; for you
As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new.

I, like an usurpt towne, to another due,
Labour to admit you, but Oh, to no end,
Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend
But is captiv'd, and proves weake or untrue.

Yet dearely I love you, and would be loved faine,
But am betroth'd unto your enemy:
Divorce mee, untie, or breake that knot againe,

Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I
Except you enthrall mee, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish mee.

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

In the black, dismal dungeon of despair Z190 (pub. 1688)

realised by Benjamin Britten

In the black dismal dungeon of despair,
Pin'd with tormenting care,
Wrack'd with my fears,
Drown'd in my tears,
With dreadful expectation of my doom
And certain horrid judgement soon to come.
Lord, here I lie,
Lost to all hope of liberty,
Hence never to remove
But by a miracle of Love,
Which I scarce dare hope for, or expect,
Being guilty of so long, so great neglect.
Fool that I was, worthy a sharper rod,
To slight thy courting, O my God!
For thou did'st woo, intreat, and grieve,
Did'st beg me to be happy and to live;
But I would not; I chose to dwell
With Death, far from thee,
Too near to Hell.
But is there no redemption, no relief?
Jesu! Thou sav'd'st a Magdalen, a thief;
O Jesu! Thy mercy, Lord, once more advance.
O give me such a glance
As Peter had; thy sweet, kind, chiding look
Will change my heart, as it did melt that rock;
Look on me, sweet Jesu, as thou did'st on him!
'Tis more than to create, thus, to redeem.

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

Benjamin Britten

Oh might those sighes and teares from *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* Op. 35

John Donne

Oh might those sighes and teares return againe
Into my breast and eyes, which I have spent,
That I might in this holy discontent
Mourne with some fruit, as I have mourn'd in vaine;
In mine Idolatry what show'rs of rain
Mine eyes did waste? What griefs my heart did rent?
That sufferance was my sinne; now I repent
'Cause I did suffer, I must suffer paine.
Th'hydroptique drunkard, and night scouting thief,
The itchy lecher and self-tickling proud
Have the remembrance of past joyes, for relief
Of coming ills. To poore me is allow'd
No ease; for long, yet vehement grieve hath been
Th'effect and cause, the punishment and sinne.

Tōru Tamura (b.1938)

When the wind blows (1938)

Fujiwara no Tadamichi

When the wind blows,
Through the scattering pearls of dew from the Bush
Clover,
One can glimpse the fleeting moon over the field.

Benjamin Britten

Oh, to vex me from *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* Op. 35

John Donne

Oh, to vex me, contraries meet in one:
In constancy unnaturally hath begott
A constant habit; that when I would not
I change in vowes, and in devotione.
As humorous is my contritione
As my profane Love and as soone forgott:
As ridlingly distemper'd, cold and hott,
As praying, as mute; as infinite, as none.
I durst not view Heav'n yesterday; and today
In prayers, and flatt'ring speeches I court God:
Tomorrow I quake with true feare of his rod.
So my devout fitts come and go away,
Like a fantastique Ague: save that here
Those are my best dayes, when I shake with feare.

Stephen Hough

Hotel from *Songs from Isolation*

Rumi, adapted by Stephen Hough

We are each like an hotel.
Every morning a new arrival -
Joy, sadness, meanness, awareness:
All turn up as unexpected guests.

Embrace and entertain each one,
Be they a crowd of sorrows,
Violently sweeping your house
Clean of its furniture, still:
Treat each guest with honour.
It may be a Spring-clean to allow
For some fresh delight.

The dark thought,
The blush of shame,
The stench of malice,
Greet them at the door with a smile,
Welcome them inside.

Be grateful for whoever visits
Because each one has been sent
As a blessing from beyond.

Benjamin Britten

What if this present from *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* Op. 35

John Donne

What if this present were the world's last night?
Marke in my heart, O Soule, where thou dost dwell,
The picture of Christ crucified, and tell
Whether that countenance can thee affright,
Teares in his eyes quench the amazing light,
Blood fills his frownes, which from his pierc'd head fell.
And can that tongue adjudge thee into hell,
Which pray'd forgiveness for his foes fierce spight?
No, no; but as in my Idolatrie
I said to all my profane mistresses,
Beauty, of pity, foulness onely is
A sign of rigour: so I say to thee,
To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assign'd,
This beauteous forme assures a piteous minde.

Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992)

Paysage from *Poèmes pour Mi* (1936)
Olivier Messiaen

Le lac comme un gros bijou bleu. ...	The lake like a big blue jewel. The road full of sorrows and pot-holes, my feet faltering in the dust, the lake like a big blue jewel. And there she is, green and blue like the landscape! Between corn and sun I see her face: She smiles, one hand shading her eyes. The lake like a big blue jewel.
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Benjamin Britten

Since she whom I loved from *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* Op. 35
John Donne

Since she whom I loved hath payd her last debt
To Nature, and to hers, and my good is dead,
And her Soule early into heaven ravished,
Wholly on heavenly things my mind is sett.
Here the admyring her my mind did whett
To seeke thee God; so streames do shew their head;
But although I have found thee, and thou my thirst hast
fed,
A holy thirsty dropsy melts mee yett.
But why should I begg more Love, when as thou
Dost wooe my soule for hers; offering all thine:
And dost not only feare least I allow
My Love to Saints and Angels things divine,
But in thy tender jealousy dost doubt
Least the World, Fleshe, yea Devill putt thee out.

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

The Call from *5 Mystical Songs* (1911)
George Herbert

Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life:
Such a Way, as gives us breath:
Such a Truth, as ends all strife:
And such a Life, as killeth death.

Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength:
Such a Light, as shows a feast:
Such a Feast, as mends in length:
Such a Strength, as makes his guest.

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart:
Such a Joy, as none can move:
Such a Love, as none can part:
Such a Heart, as joys in love.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Auflösung D807 (1824) Dissolution
Johann Mayrhofer

Verbirg dich, Sonne, Denn die Gluten der Wonne Versengen mein Gebein; Verstummet Töne, Frühlings Schöne Flüchte dich, und lass mich allein!	Conceal yourself, sun, for the fires of rapture scorch my whole being; fall silent, sounds, spring beauty flee, and leave me to myself!
Quillen doch aus allen Falten Meiner Seele liebliche Gewalten; Die mich umschlingen, Himmlich singen – Geh’ unter Welt, und störe	For sweet powers well up from every recess of my soul, and envelop me with celestial song – dissolve, world, and never more
Nimmer die süssen ätherischen Chöre!	disturb the sweet ethereal choirs!

Benjamin Britten

At the round earth’s imagined corners from *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* Op. 35
John Donne

At the round earth’s imagined corners, blew
Your trumpets, angels, and arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go,
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o’erthrow
All whom war, death, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despair, law, chance hath slain; and you whose eyes
Shall behold God and never taste death’s woe,
But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space,
For, if above all these my sins abound,
’Tis late to ask abundance of Thy grace,
When we are there. Here on this lowly ground,
Teach me how to repent, for that’s as good
As if Thou hadst seal’d my pardon with Thy blood.

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

Frank Bridge (1879-1941)

Journey's End (1925)

Humbert Wolfe

What will they give me, when journey's done?
Your own room to be quiet in, Son!

Who shares it with me? There is none
Shares that cool dormitory, Son!

Who turns the sheets? There is but one
And no one needs to turn it, Son!

Who lights the candle? Everyone
Sleeps without candle all night, Son!

Who calls me after sleeping? Son!
You are not called when journey's done.

Paul Hindemith (1895-1963)

Wie Sankt Franciscus schweb' ich in der Luft (1920)

Christian Morgenstern

Wie Sankt Franciscus
schweb' ich in der Luft
Mit beiden Füßen, fühle
nicht den Grund
Der Erde mehr, weiss nicht
mehr, was das ist.

Seid still! Nein, – redet, singt,
jedweder Mund!
Sonst wird die Ewigkeit ganz
meine Gruft
Und nimmt mich auf wie
einst den tiefen Christ.

Like Saint Francis I float through the air

Like Saint Francis I float
through the air
with both feet, no longer
feel the ground
or earth beneath me, no
longer know what that is.

Hush! No – speak, let
everyone sing!
Eternity will otherwise be
my entire tomb
and will raise me up, like
once the deep Christ.

Benjamin Britten

From *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* Op. 35

John Donne

Thou hast made me

Thou hast made me, and shall thy work decay?
Repaire me now, for now mine end doth haste,
I runne to death, and death meets me as fast,
And all my pleasures are like yesterday;
I dare not move my dim eyes anyway,
Despaire behind, and death before doth cast
Such terror, and my feeble flesh doth waste
By sinne in it, which it t'wards Hell doth weigh;
Onely thou art above, and when t'wards thee
By thy leave I can looke, I rise againe;
But our old subtle foe so tempteth me,
That not one houre myselfe can I sustaine;
Thy Grace may wing me to prevent his art,
And thou like Adamant draw mine iron heart.

Death, be not proud

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not soe,
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill mee.
From rest and sleepe, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee, much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do goe,
Rest of their bones, and souls deliverie.
Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings and desperate men,
And dost with poyson, warre, and sickness dwell,
And poppie, or charmes can make us sleepe as well
And better than thy stroake; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

John Weldon (1676-1736)

Alleluia

Liturgical text

realised by Benjamin Britten

Alleluia.

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