

# WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 20 December 2023  
7.30pm

Dorothea Röschmann soprano  
Scott Dickinson viola  
Malcolm Martineau piano

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)      Alte Liebe Op. 72 No. 1 (1876)  
Auf dem Kirchhofe Op. 105 No. 4 (c.1888)  
Der Tod, das ist die kühle Nacht Op. 96 No. 1 (1884)  
Unbewegte laue Luft Op. 57 No. 8 (c.1871)  
Liebestreu Op. 3 No. 1 (1853)  
Meine Liebe ist grün Op. 63 No. 5 (1873)  
Wir wandelten Op. 96 No. 2 (1884)  
Nachtigall Op. 97 No. 1 (c.1885)  
Von ewiger Liebe Op. 43 No. 1 (1864)  
2 Songs with viola Op. 91 (1863-84)  
*Gestillte Sehnsucht • Geistliches Wiegenlied*

*Interval*

Richard Wagner (1813-1883)      Wesendonck Lieder (1857-8)  
*Der Engel • Stehe still! • Im Treibhaus •  
Schmerzen • Träume*

Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951)      From *Brettli-Lieder* (1901)  
Galathea • Gigerlette • Der genügsame Liebhaber •  
Mahnung • Arie aus *Dem Spiegel von Arkadien*

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**Brahms** was a prolific songwriter throughout his career, and this recital includes songs spanning several decades, from the early 'Liebestreu', which he unveiled to the enthusiastic Schumann circle in 1853, to a handful of mature and reflective songs from the later 1880s. The first three songs are occupied with things past: the upwards arpeggios of 'Alte Liebe' spin threads of nostalgia, against which the vocal line's repeated rhythm is halting and heavy; the stormy graveyard scene of 'Auf dem Kirchhofe' is transformed by a consolatory move, at the very end, into the major with a Bach-like chorale. 'Der Tod, das ist die kühle Nacht' is drawn from Heine's *Buch der Lieder*, and tells of a protagonist on their deathbed: the constant rhythm underpinning much of the song might be heard as both comforting and foreboding, and a magnificent moment towards the end evokes a fluttering nightingale clinging onto the beauty of life as it fades away. 'Unbewegte laue Luft', a Daumer setting published in 1871, is unusual for its frank expression of a woman's sexual desire, and caused quite a stir among the more proper members of Brahms's circle. The intoxicating stillness of the opening is immediately coloured by a sultry pair of flattened pitches – scale degree 2 in the piano's left hand, and 6 in the vocal melody – which set the tone for a song rich in chromatic pitch play. It is very much a song of two halves: the protagonist's articulation of her desire gives rise to a dramatic change of pace, and her increasing anticipation of ecstasy propels the song through to its end.

Published as part of his Op. 3, 'Liebestreu' was among Brahms's first efforts as a song composer, and its ardent expressivity wowed early listeners and remains a firm favourite among recitalists and audiences today. The song presents a dialogue between mother and daughter, thematising the constancy of faithful love in the face of upset. Familial love stands as a backdrop to 'Meine Liebe ist grün': the poem was sent to Brahms by Clara Schumann with a sense of pride – it was written by her son Felix. Felix was born in 1854 while Brahms was a frequent presence in the Schumann house, and he became the composer's godson. Brahms presented the song to Clara for Christmas 1873, and both she and Felix were understandably delighted with the exuberant setting, which contains an overt homage to songs by Robert Schumann. Brahms grouped his luminous Daumer setting 'Wir wandelten' with three Heine songs (including 'Der Tod, das ist die kühle Nacht' heard earlier) for publication as Op. 96; the song was praised by Brahms's friend Elisabeth von Herzogenberg for the depth of its emotional expression and its perfect blending of words and music. The unsettled piano chirping and sparser textures of 'Nachtigall' return once more to the theme of lost love – which this time is experienced as a piercing pain – before the fast-unfolding, through-composed narrative of 'Von ewiger Liebe' reinforces (with iron and steel) the necessity of love's endurance.

Brahms wrote the two Op. 91 songs for voice, viola and piano for his friends, contralto Amalie and violinist Joseph Joachim. The second, 'Geistliches Wiegenlied', was composed first, for the Joachim marriage in 1863: it is a gently lilting lullaby, beginning with an iteration in the viola of the medieval carol 'Resonet in Laudibus', and was performed at the baptism of the Joachim's son Johannes (named for Brahms) in 1864. 'Gestillte Sehnsucht' was composed around 20 years later, as a token of Brahms's encouragement for the by-then troubled couple to reconcile.

Mathilde Wesendonck was a poet who became acquainted with **Wagner** through her husband, a wealthy silk merchant who provided the composer with financial support and a place to stay while he was in exile following the Dresden uprising of May 1849. Over the following years, Wesendonck became the subject of Wagner's infatuation, and their exchange of letters seemingly contributed to the break-up of the composer's marriage in 1858. Wagner's settings of five of Wesendonck's poems were written alongside the planning of his romantic epic *Tristan and Isolde*, and two of the songs ('Im Treibhaus' and 'Träume') were explicitly written as 'studies' for the opera – aspects of their motivic and harmonic workings are audible in passages including the famous love duet and the prelude to Act III. Wesendonck's poems are replete with vibrant imagery – bleeding heart, weeping sun, lamenting trees – which is treated delicately and passionately in Wagner's music; the songs meditate on themes of love, dreams, and the mysteries of the universe.

This selection of five of **Schoenberg's** cabaret songs comprises an under-heard but important dimension of Schoenberg's earlier and lighter songwriting style. They were written between April and autumn 1901, using texts either drawn from, or written in a similar vein to, the contents of Otto Bierbaum's popular compendium of light verse *Deutsche Chansons*, subtitled *Brettlieder* (the word 'Brettli' references the wooden stage boards of variety shows). Schoenberg became associated with the Berlin *Überbrettli* cabaret established by Ernst von Wolzogen, which strove towards combining elements of variety shows and cabarets with an elevated literary sensibility, in a Parisian vein; Schoenberg was briefly its music director before the cabaret began to lose audience favour and eventually folded. Tonight's selection contains settings of poems by Frank Wedekind and Otto Bierbaum (in the highly sexualised visions of 'Galathea' and 'Gigerlette', respectively), Hugo Salus (an extremely suggestive cat poem), Gustav Hochstetter (a warning to women), and Mozart's friend Emanuel Schikaneder (an aria-waltz). Musically, the richly chromatic language of Schoenberg's earlier music is heard in conjunction with influences from Viennese operetta and various popular styles.

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