

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 20 January 2024
7.30pm

This concert is supported by the Rick Mather David Scrase Foundation

Christian Gerhaher baritone
Gerold Huber piano

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Le papillon et la fleur Op. 1 No. 1 (1861)
A Clymène from *5 mélodies 'de Venise'* Op. 58 (1891)
Les berceaux Op. 23 No. 1 (1879)
Spleen Op. 51 No. 3 (1888)
Danseuse from *Mirages* Op. 113 (1919)
Clair de lune Op. 46 No. 2 (1887)
Notre amour Op. 23 No. 2 (c.1879)

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Again, as before, alone Op. 73 No. 6 (1893)
Take my heart away (1873)

Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Mazurka in A minor Op. 17 No. 4 (1833)
My genius, my angel, my friend (c.1855-60)
Do not believe, my friend Op. 6 No. 1 (1869)

Fryderyk Chopin

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Mazurka in C sharp minor Op. 30 No. 4 (1837)
Cradle song Op. 16 No. 1 (1872)
The first meeting Op. 63 No. 4 (1887)

Fryderyk Chopin

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Mazurka in E minor Op. 41 No. 2 (1838-9)
As over burning embers Op. 25 No. 2 (1875)
Not a word, O my friend Op. 6 No. 2 (1869)

Interval

Pavel Haas (1899-1944)

4 Songs on Chinese Poetry (1944)
*Zaslech jsem divoké husy • V bambusovém háji •
Daleko měsíc je od domova • Probděná noc*

Fryderyk Chopin

Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)

Ballade No. 4 in F minor Op. 52 (1842)
Les nuits d'été Op. 7 (1840-1)
*Villanelle • Le spectre de la rose • Sur les lagunes •
Absence • Au cimetière • L'île inconnue*

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Fauré spent his earliest childhood in the Occitanie region of south-west France, but by the age of nine he showed such conspicuous musical talent that he was enrolled at Louis Niedermeyer's newly opened music school in Paris, where he boarded for the next 11 years. In 1861, Fauré began lessons with Saint-Saëns, and his first official opus, 'Le papillon et la fleur', dates from the same year. It is an auspicious debut, demonstrating the melodious charm characteristic of Fauré's entire output; Saint-Saëns, who would later ease Fauré's entry into Parisian musical life by introducing him to its key figures, showed his approval by drawing on the manuscript - a flower, and a butterfly sporting a crown. The *mélodie* form remained important to Fauré throughout his long life, and he is often regarded as the finest of all French song composers. He was sometimes criticised for preferring second-rank poetry; certainly he enjoyed the freedom afforded by verse whose metre and form are not particularly distinctive. The momentum of 'Les berceaux', for example, comes less from Prudhomme's verse than from Fauré's flexible vocal line; 'Notre amour' counteracts Silvestre's repetitive structure by moving fluently between keys; 'Danseuse', composed more than quarter of a century later than any other Fauré song in this recital, uses a striking piano ostinato to bring de Brimont's erotic vision to life. But Fauré's numerous settings of Verlaine, the great Symbolist 14 months his senior, are no less accomplished, as the three heard tonight demonstrate. 'A Clymène' was composed during Fauré's 1891 stay at the Venice palazzo of the sewing-machine heiress and patron Winnaretta Singer, who had offered him an opera commission; Fauré approached Verlaine in vain for a libretto, an indication of his regard for the poet.

Fauré's near-contemporary **Tchaikovsky** also composed a hundred or so songs, but although they enjoyed considerable success in his lifetime they have been somewhat eclipsed since his death, at least in the West, by the orchestral and theatrical music for which he is now best known. This relative neglect is unfortunate: Tchaikovsky's song output contains some of his most intimate and heartfelt music and encompasses a wide variety of mood and style, synthesising the lyricism and formal control of Schumann with occasional Glinka-esque nationalistic inflections. Many of his songs were inspired by personal events - for example, the news in 1873 that the wife of his friend Rimsky-Korsakov was expecting the couple's first child drew from him the exquisite 'Cradle Song'. Tchaikovsky's final set of songs, Op. 73, was completed only a few months before his mysterious death: the last of them, 'Again, as before, alone', gives a clear indication of his desperate loneliness and troubled state of mind.

Following his upbringing as a child prodigy in Warsaw, **Chopin** left Poland for Paris at the age of 20, shortly before the November 1830 Uprising. Though he never returned to Poland and took French citizenship in 1835, he always regarded himself as Polish and much

of the music he composed in exile explores this identity, including his 60 or so mazurkas. The mazurka is a traditional Polish dance in triple time, characterised by strong accents on the second or third beats. Though Chopin's mazurkas are not intended for dancing, and are harmonically and texturally much more complex than a typical dance number, he nonetheless keeps the dance's characteristics in mind. Chopin typically published mazurkas in sets of four, with the last of the group generally the longest and most complex. The first two in tonight's recital, composed in 1833 and 1837 respectively, are 'final movements' of this type; Op. 41 No. 2 dates from the winter of 1838-9 which Chopin spent on Mallorca with his lover George Sand and mixes Mallorcan rhythms with those of Poland. The ballade form, meanwhile, was one that Chopin himself invented: the fourth and last, composed in Paris in 1842, is one of the most admired (and most difficult) of all 19th-century piano works.

The Czech composer **Pavel Haas** studied at the Brno Conservatory under Janáček, who remained the dominant influence on his music throughout his tragically short life. Because of his Jewish origins, Haas was persecuted during the German occupation of the Czech lands, and performances of his music were banned. In 1941 he was imprisoned at the Terezín concentration camp, where he worked on an unfinished symphony as well as the *Study for strings* (1943) and the *4 Songs on Chinese Poetry* (1944). Despite the remote historical and geographical origins of the texts Haas chose, his heartfelt setting draws out their contemporary relevance - there is nothing exoticised about his interpretation. The songs are linked by a recurring musical reference to the Chorale of St Wenceslaus, the patron saint of the Czech lands, which surely represents the composer's longing for freedom and his homeland. During the same year in which he composed these songs, Haas was killed in a gas chamber at Auschwitz.

Berlioz originally conceived *Les nuits d'été* as a song-cycle for mezzo-soprano or tenor with piano accompaniment. He finished the work in 1841, but there is no record of a public performance of the complete piano-vocal version in Berlioz's lifetime, nor indeed of the 1856 orchestration: the only performances Berlioz is known to have heard are those he conducted of the orchestral versions of 'Absence' and 'Le spectre de la rose'. The texts are by the Romantic poet Théophile Gautier: critic, essayist, dramatist and apostle of 'art for art's sake'. Gautier recognised Berlioz as a kindred spirit, whose music possessed 'that indefinable "something" for which language is inadequate but which can be heard in music.' Though there is no continuous narrative or consistent protagonist in *Les nuits d'été*, the songs are united by the theme of the transience of love, and Gautier's words inspired one of Berlioz's most luminous scores.

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