WIGMORE HALL 125

Saturday 21 February 2026
7.30pm

English Songs

James Baillieu piano
Sophie Bevan soprano

Samuel Barber (1910-1981)	Hermit Songs Op. 29 (1952-3) *At Saint Patrick's Purgatory • Church Bell at Night • St Ita's Vision • The Heavenly Banquet • The Crucifixion • Sea-Snatch • Promiscuity • The Monk and His Cat • The Praises of God • The Desire for Hermitage*
Frank Bridge (1879-1941)	Goldenhair (1925)
Muriel Herbert (1897-1984)	The Lake Isle of Innisfree (1928)
Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)	From *Vol. 4 Moore's Irish Melodies* (1957) *Avenging and bright • How sweet the answer • Sail on, sail on • The minstrel boy • At the mid hour of night*
	Interval
Benjamin Britten	From *Vol. 4 Moore's Irish Melodies* *Rich and Rare • Dear harp of my country! • Oft in the stilly night • The last rose of summer • O the sight entrancing*
Samuel Barber	3 Songs (James Joyce) Op. 10 (1936) *Rain Has Fallen • Sleep Now • I Hear an Army*
Frank Bridge	When you are old (1919)
Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979)	A Dream (1928)
Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)	A Piper (1925)
Edward Elgar (1857-1934)	There are seven that pull the thread (1901)
Roger Quilter (1877-1953)	What will you do, love (1942)
Michael Head (1900-1976)	Beloved from *Over the rim of the moon* (1918)

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The decades around the turn of the 20th Century were a time of great artistic development in England and Ireland. At a time when the Home Rule movement was gaining momentum, Ireland's growing national consciousness was represented by figures such as the poet William Butler Yeats, who founded its National Literary Society. At the same time, English composers, many of them passing through the new Royal College of Music, sought to establish a home-grown school of composition to emulate the achievements of their continental counterparts. Tonight's recital illustrates how these trends – loosely termed the Irish literary revival and English musical renaissance – did not exist in isolation, but fed into each other.

Theatre was a key part of Yeats's vision for Irish literature, and in 1901, he collaborated with the novelist George Moore on a play retelling the Irish myth of Diarmuid and Gráinne. Moore approached **Edward Elgar** to provide incidental music, which included a song to Yeats's words, *There are seven that pull the thread*, sung by a Druidess whose spinning wheel can foretell death. The result is a fascinating curio, as this most English composer tries on the loose robes of the Celtic bard.

'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold' wrote Yeats in 1919. The mounting crisis of Home Rule led to civil war in Ireland and the founding of the Irish Free State in 1922. In the meantime, the First World War profoundly shaped lives on both sides of the Irish Sea. The teenage **Michael Head** was working in a munitions factory in 1918 when he composed four settings of words by Francis Ledwidge. An Irish poet enlisted in the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, Ledwidge had sent poetry home from the front before his death at Ypres in 1917. The simple affection and nature imagery of his lyric 'Beloved' must have appealed to the budding composer during the privations of wartime.

In the inter-war years, Yeats's poetry would prove a popular source for British composers emerging from the Royal College. **Frank Bridge**'s *When you are old* lulls us to a fireside reverie, while **Muriel Herbert**'s *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* is a hymn to blissful solitude in a flowing, lyrical style. **Rebecca Clarke**'s *A Dream* has a more sinister edge: this deathly vision is haunted by icy tinkling in the piano's uppermost register.

On the continent, another Irish author was making a name for himself with his ground-breaking novel *Ulysses*. Music had a huge importance for James Joyce, and before the publication of his 1907 poetry collection *Chamber Music*, he expressed hope that it might attract composers. Many would oblige. **Bridge** set the simple lyric *Goldenhair* with rippling sensuality, while in America, the young **Samuel Barber** – who had Irish heritage of his own – used the collection for his *3 Songs* of 1936. 'Rain has fallen' turns from dripping impressionism to swelling passion, 'Sleep now' is an uneasy lullaby, and 'I hear an army' evokes the thundering horses of a lover's anguish.

As the middle of the century approached, Yeats and Joyce both died, but Irish writing continued to cast its spell. Some composers began delving into earlier sources. Samuel Lover was a 19th-century Renaissance man – writer, painter and composer – and **Roger Quilter** made an exquisitely tender setting of his song *What will you do, love?* in 1942. He dedicated it to his nephew Arnold Vivian, who was serving in the Second World War. Tragically, he would be killed in action the following year.

In 1952, **Barber** took a summer holiday in Ireland. On visiting Yeats's grave in a Sligo churchyard, he found the old poet buried 'in the very bosom of a family of Barbers'. But Dublin disappointed: this 'strangely dead city' seemed indifferent to his literary heroes. Perhaps disillusioned, on his return home Barber turned instead to Ireland's medieval past. His cycle *Hermit Songs* set translations of the marginalia of monks: 'small poems, thoughts, or observations', which 'speak in straightforward, droll, and often surprisingly modern terms of the simple life these men led'.

Barber notates the songs without time signatures, letting the music ebb and flow with the words, and fills them out with resonant, bell-like harmonies. Sacred and profane rub shoulders, from the ecstatic lullaby of 'St Ita's vision' to the riotous 'Heavenly banquet' which imagines an eternity of boozing. 'The monk and his cat' is a cute vignette of feline companionship (with mischievous paws treading across the piano), while the final song, 'The desire for hermitage', pivots from austere meditation to heartfelt longing.

This period saw a revival of interest in folk music in both Britain and Ireland, and **Vaughan Williams**'s fleeting setting of Seumas O'Sullivan's *A Piper* bears the hallmark of his folk-influenced, modal style. By the middle of the century, however, **Benjamin Britten** was taking traditional melodies in his own direction. While giving recitals with the tenor Peter Pears in the 1940s, he discovered that folksongs went down very well as encores, and over subsequent years, he put together six volumes of his own settings. The fourth of these draws on Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies*, a collection from the early 19th Century. Britten demonstrates an opera composer's keen eye for characterisation, with piano parts that fixate on short, memorable ideas to emphasise an essential quality of the song. In the bellicose flourishes of 'Avenging and bright', the echoes of 'How sweet the answer', the misty arpeggios of 'Dear harp of my country' and the drumbeat-rhythms of 'The minstrel boy', Britten casts these old melodies in dramatic new light. But it is the eloquent simplicity of 'The last rose of summer', set to chords of brooding grandeur, which perhaps leaves the deepest impression.

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Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

Hermit Songs Op. 29 (1952-3)

At Saint Patrick's Purgatory

Pity me on my pilgrimage to Loch Derg!
O King of the churches and the bells
Bewailing your sores and your wounds,
But not a tear can I squeeze from my eyes!
Not moisten an eye after so much sin!
Pity me, O King!

What shall I do with a heart that seeks only its own ease?
O only begotten Son by whom all men were made,
Who shunned not the death by three wounds,
Pity me on my pilgrimage to Loch Derg
And I with a heart not softer than a stone!

Church Bell at Night

Sweet little bell, struck on a windy night,
I would liefer keep tryst with thee
Than be
With a light and foolish woman.

St Ita's Vision

'I will take nothing from my Lord', said she,
'Unless He gives me His Son from Heaven
In the form of a Baby that I may nurse Him'.
So that Christ came down to her
In the form of a Baby and then she said:
'Infant Jesus, at my breast,
Nothing in this world is true
Save, O tiny nursling, You.
Infant Jesus, at my breast,
By my heart every night,
You I nurse are not
A churl but were begot
On Mary the Jewess by Heaven's Light.
Infant Jesus, at my breast,
What King is there but You who could
Give everlasting Good?
Wherefore I give my food.
Sing to Him, maidens, sing your best!
There is none that has such right
To your song as Heaven's King
Who every night
Is Infant Jesus at my breast'.

The Heavenly Banquet

I would like to have the men of Heaven in my own house;
With vats of good cheer laid out for them.
I would like to have the three Marys, their fame is so great.
I would like people from every corner of Heaven.
I would like them to be cheerful in their drinking.
I would like to have Jesus sitting here among them.
I would like a great lake of beer for the King of Kings.
I would like to be watching Heaven's family
Drinking it through all eternity.

The Crucifixion

At the cry of the first bird
They began to crucify Thee, O Swan!
Never shall lament cease because of that.
It was like the parting of day from night.
Ah, sore was the suffering borne
By the body of Mary's Son,
But sorer still to Him was the grief
Which for His sake
Came upon His Mother.

Sea-Snatch

It has broken us, it has crushed us, it has drowned us,
O King of the starbright Kingdom of Heaven!
The wind has consumed us, swallowed us,
As timber is devoured by crimson fire from Heaven.
It has broken us, it has crushed us, it has drowned us,
O King of the starbright Kingdom of Heaven!

Promiscuity

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

The Monk and His Cat

Pangur, white Pangur,
How happy we are
Alone together,
Scholar and cat.
Each has his own work to do daily;
For you it is hunting, for me study.
Your shining eye watches the wall;
My feeble eye is fixed on a book.
You rejoice when your claws
Entrap a mouse;
I rejoice when my mind
Fathoms a problem.
Pleased with his own art,
Neither hinders the other;
Thus we live ever
Without tedium and envy.
Pangur, white Pangur,
How happy we are
Alone together,
Scholar and cat.

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

The Praises of God

How foolish the man
Who does not raise
His voice and praise
With joyful words,
As he alone can,
Heaven's High King.
To Whom the light birds
With no soul but air,
All day, everywhere
Laudation sing.

The Desire for Hermitage

Ah! To be all alone in a little cell with nobody near me;
Beloved that pilgrimage before the last pilgrimage to Death.
Singing the passing hours to cloudy Heaven;
Feeding upon dry bread and water from the cold spring.
That will be an end to evil when I am alone
In a lovely little corner among tombs
Far from the houses of the great.
Ah! To be all alone in a little cell,
To be alone, all alone:
Alone I came into the world,
Alone I shall go from it.

Frank Bridge (1879-1941)

Goldenhair (1925)
James Joyce

Lean out of the window,
Goldenhair,
I heard you singing
A merry air.

My book is closed;
I read no more,
Watching the fire dance
On the floor.

I have left my book,
I have left my room,
For I heard you singing
Through the gloom,

Singing and singing
A merry air.
Lean out of the window,
Goldenhair.

Muriel Herbert (1897-1984)

The Lake Isle of Innisfree (1928)
William Butler Yeats

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings,
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

From *Vol. 4 Moore's Irish Melodies* (1957)
Thomas Moore

Avenging and bright

Avenging and bright fall the swift sword of Erin
On him who the brave sons of Usna betrayed!
For every fond eye he hath waken'd a tear in,
A drop from his heart-wounds shall weep o'er her blade.

By the red cloud which hung over Conor's dark dwelling,
When Ulad's three champions lay sleeping in gore –
By the billows of war, which so often, high swelling,
Have wafted these heroes to victory's shore –

We swear to avenge them! – no joy shall be tasted,
The harp shall be silent, the maiden unwed,
Our halls shall be mute, and our fields shall lie wasted,
Till vengeance be wreak'd on the murderer's head.

Yes, monarch! though sweet are our home recollections,
Though sweet are the tears that from tenderness fall;
Though sweet are our friendships, our hopes, our affections,
Revenge on a tyrant is sweetest of all!

How sweet the answer

How sweet the answer Echo makes
To Music at night,
When, rous'd by lute or horn, she wakes,
And far away, o'er lawns and lakes,
Goes answering light.

Yet love hath echoes truer far,
And far more sweet,
Than e'er beneath the moonlight's star,
Of horn, or lute, or soft guitar,
The songs repeat.

'Tis when the sigh, in youth sincere,
And only then -
The sigh, that's breath'd for one to hear,
Is by that one, that only dear,
Breath'd back again.

Sail on, sail on

Sail on, sail on, thou fearless bark,
Wherever blows the welcome wind;
It cannot lead to scenes more dark,
More sad than those we leave behind.
Each smiling billow seems to say
'Though death beneath our surface be,
Less cold we are, less false than they,
Whose smiling wrecked thy hopes and thee.'

Sail on, sail on, through endless space,
Through calm, through tempest, stop no more;
The stormiest sea's a resting-place
To him who leaves such hearts on shore.
Or, if some desert land we meet,
Where never yet false-hearted men
Profaned a world, that else were sweet,
Then rest thee, bark, but not till then.

The minstrel boy

The Minstrel Boy to the war is gone
In the ranks of death you'll find him;
His father's sword he has girded on,
And his wild harp slung behind him.
'Land of Song', said the warrior bard,
'Tho' all the world betrays thee,
One sword, at least, thy rights shall guard,
One faithful harp shall praise thee'.

The Minstrel fell! but the foeman's chain
Could not bring that proud soul under,
The harp he lov'd ne'er spoke again,
For he tore its chords asunder;
And said, 'No chains shall sully thee,
Thou soul of love and brav'ry!
Thy songs were made for the pure and free,
They shall never sound in slav'ry'.

At the mid hour of night

At the mid hour of night, when stars are weeping, I fly
To the lone vale we loved, when life shone warm in thine eye;
And I think oft, if spirits can steal from the regions of air
To revisit past scenes of delight, thou wilt come to me there,
And tell me our love is remember'd even in the sky.

Then I sing the wild song it once was rapture to hear,
When our voices commingling breathed like one on the ear;
And as Echo far off through the vale my sad orison rolls,
I think, O my love! 'tis thy voice from the Kingdom of Souls
Faintly answering still the notes that once were so dear.

Interval

Benjamin Britten

From *Vol. 4 Moore's Irish Melodies*
Thomas Moore

Rich and Rare

Rich and rare were the gems she wore,
And a bright gold ring on her wand she bore;
But oh! her beauty was far beyond
Her sparkling gems, or snow-white wand.

'Lady! dost thou not fear to stray,
So lone and lovely through this bleak way?
Are Erin's sons so good or so cold,
As not to be tempted by woman or gold?'

'Sir Knight! I feel not the least alarm,
No son of Erin will offer me harm:
For though they love woman and golden store,
Sir Knight! they love honour and virtue more!'

On she went, and her maiden smile
In safety lighted her round the Green Isle;
And blest for ever is she who relied
Upon Erin's honour and Erin's pride.

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

Dear harp of my country!

Dear Harp of my Country! in darkness I found thee,
The cold chain of silence had hung o'er thee long;
When proudly, my own Island Harp! I unbound thee
And gave all thy chords to light, freedom and song!

The warm lay of love and the light tone of gladness
Have waken'd thy fondest, thy liveliest thrill;
But so oft hast thou echo'd the deep sigh of sadness,
That e'en in thy mirth it will steal from thee still.

Dear Harp of my Country! farewell to thy numbers
This sweet wreath of song is the last we shall twine,
Go, sleep with the sunshine of Fame on thy slumbers,
Till touch'd by some hand less unworthy than mine.

If the pulse of the patriot, soldier, or lover,
Have throbb'd at our lay 'tis thy glory alone;
I was but as the wind, passing heedlessly over,
And all the wild sweetness I waked was thy own!

Oft in the stilly night

Oft in the stilly night,
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Fond Memory brings the light
Of other days around me;
The smiles, the tears,
Of boyhood's years,
The words of love then spoken;
The eyes that shone,
Now dimmed and gone,
The cheerful hearts now broken!
Thus in the stilly night,
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Sad Memory brings the light
Of other days around me.

When I remember all
The friends so linked together
I've seen around me fall,
Like leaves in wintry weather,
I feel like one
Who treads alone
Some banquet-hall deserted,
Whose lights are fled,
Whose garlands dead,
And all but he departed!
Thus in the stilly night,
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Sad Memory brings the light
Of other days around me.

The last rose of summer

'Tis the last rose of summer,
Left blooming alone;
All her lovely companions
Are faded and gone;
No flow'r of her kindred,
No rosebud is nigh
To reflect back her blushes,
Or give sigh for sigh.

I'll not leave thee, thou lone one,
To pine on the stem;
Since the lovely are sleeping,
Go, sleep thou with them;
Thus kindly I scatter
Thy leaves o'er the bed,
Where thy mates of the garden
Lie senseless and dead.

So soon may I follow,
When friendships decay,
And from Love's shining circle
The gems drop away!
When true hearts lie wither'd,
And fond ones are flown,
Oh! who would inhabit
This bleak world alone?

O the sight entrancing

O the sight entrancing,
When morning's beam is glancing
O'er files array'd
With helm and blade,
And plumes in the gay wind dancing.

When hearts are all high beating,
And the trumpet's voice repeating
That song whose breath
May lead to death,
But never to retreating.

Then if a cloud comes over
The brow of sire or lover,
Think 'tis the shade
By vict'ry made,
Whose wings right o'er us hover.

Yet 'tis not helm or feather
For ask yon despot whether
His plumèd bands
Could bring such hands
And hearts as ours together.

Leave pomps to those who need 'em,
Adorn but man with freedom,
And proud he braves
The gaudiest slaves
That crawl where monarchs lead 'em.

The sword may pierce the beaver,
Stone walls in time my sever,
'Tis mind alone,
Worth steel and stone,
That keeps men free for ever!

Samuel Barber

3 Songs (James Joyce) Op. 10 (1936)
James Joyce

Rain Has Fallen

Rain has fallen all the day.
O come among the laden trees:
The leaves lie thick upon the way
Of mem'ries.

Staying a little by the way
Of mem'ries shall we depart.
Come, my beloved, where I may
Speak to your heart.

Sleep Now

Sleep now, O sleep now,
O you unquiet heart!
A voice crying 'Sleep now'
Is heard in my heart.

The voice of the winter
Is heard at the door.
O sleep, for the winter
Is crying 'Sleep no more.'

My kiss will give peace now
And quiet to your heart –
Sleep on in peace now,
O you unquiet heart!

I Hear an Army

I hear an army charging upon the land,
And the thunder of horses plunging, foam about their knees:
Arrogant, in black armour, behind them stand,
Disdaining the reins, with flutt'ring whips, the charioteers.

They cry unto the night their battlename:
I moan in sleep when I hear afar their whirling laughter.
They cleave the gloom of dreams, a blinding flame,
Clanging, clanging upon the heart as upon an anvil.

They come shaking in triumph their long, green hair:
They come out of the sea and run shouting by the shore.
My heart, have you no wisdom thus to despair?
My love, my love, why have you left me alone?

Frank Bridge

When you are old (1919)
William Butler Yeats

When you are old and gray and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true,
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face;

And bending down beside the glowing bars,
Murmur, a little sadly, how love fled
And paced upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979)

A Dream (1928)
William Butler Yeats

I dreamed that one had died in a strange place
Near no accustomed hand;
And they had nailed the boards above her face,
The peasants of that land,
And, wond'ring, planted by her solitude
A cypress and a yew:
I came, and wrote upon a cross of wood,
Man had no more to do:
'She was more beautiful than thy first love
This lady by the trees.'
And gazed upon the mournful stars above,
And heard the mournful breeze.

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

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

A Piper (1925)
William Blake

Piping down the valleys wild,
Piping songs of pleasant glee,
On a cloud I saw a child,
And he laughing said to me:

'Pipe a song about a lamb.'
So I piped with merry chear.
'Piper, pipe that song again.'
So I piped: he wept to hear.

'Drop thy pipe, thy happy pipe;
Sing thy songs of happy chear.'
So I sang the same again,
While he wept with joy to hear.

'Piper, sit thee down and write
In a book, that all may read.'
So he vanished from my sight;
And I pluck'd a hollow reed.

And I made a rural pen,
And I stain'd the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs
Every child may joy to hear.

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

There are seven that pull the thread (1901)
William Butler Yeats

There are seven that pull the thread –
There is one under the waves,
There is one where the winds are wove,
There is one in the old grey house
Where the dew is made before dawn.
One lives in the house of the sun,
And one in the house of the moon,
And one lies under the boughs
Of the golden apple tree,
And one spinner is lost.
Holiest, holiest seven
Put all your pow'r on the thread
That I've spun in the house tonight.

Roger Quilter (1877-1953)

What will you do, love (1942)
Samuel Lover

What will you do, love, when I am going
With white sails flowing, the seas beyond?
What will you do, love, when waves divide us
And friends may chide us for being fond?

Though waves divide us, and friends be chiding
In faith abiding I'll still be true
And I'll pray for you on the stormy ocean
In deep devotion, that's what I'll do

What would you do, love, if distant tidings
Your fond confidings should undermine?
And I, abiding 'neath sultry skies
Should think other eyes were as bright as thine?

Oh say it not, though guilt and shame
Were on your name, I would still be true
But that heart of yours, should another share it
I could not bear it, what would I do?

What would you do, love, when home returning
With hopes high burning, with wealth for you
If my barque which bounded o'er the foreign foam
Should be lost near home? What would you do?

So you were spared, I'd bless the morrow
In want and sorrow, that left me you
And I'd welcome you from the wasting billow
My heart, your pillow, that's what I'll do!

Michael Head (1900-1976)

Beloved from *Over the rim of the moon* (1918)
Francis Ledwidge

Nothing but sweet music wakes
My Beloved! my Beloved!
Sleeping by the blue lakes,
My own Beloved!

Song of lark and song of thrush,
My Beloved! my Beloved!
Sing in morning's rosy bush,
My own Beloved!

When your eyes dawn blue and clear,
My Beloved! my Beloved!
You will find me waiting here,
My own Beloved!