

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 21 March 2022 1.00pm

Louise Alder soprano

Joseph Middleton piano

BBC
RADIO



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3

Amy Beach (1867-1944)

3 Browning Songs Op. 44 (1889-1900)

*The year's at the spring • Ah, Love, but a day! •
I send my heart up to thee!*

Clara Schumann (1819-1896)

Er ist gekommen Op. 12 No. 1 (1841)

Warum willst du and're fragen Op. 12 No. 3 (1841)

Liebst du um Schönheit Op. 12 No. 2 (1841)

Lili Boulanger (1893-1918)

From *Clairières dans le ciel* (1913-14)

Elle était descendue au bas de la prairie •

Vous m'avez regardé avec toute votre âme • Au pied de mon lit •

Nous nous aimerons • Si tout ceci n'est qu'un pauvre rêve

Alma Mahler (1879-1964)

Laue Sommernacht (1910)

Ich wandle unter Blumen (1910)

Licht in der Nacht (1915)

Libby Larsen (b.1950)

Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII (2000)

*Katherine of Aragon • Anne Boleyn • Jane Seymour •
Anne of Cleves • Katherine Howard*

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This recital presents snapshots from the rich and varied history of women's song composition, bookended by cycles written by American composers 100 years apart, and with visits to 1840s Leipzig and *fin-de-siècle* Vienna and Paris in between.

Amy Beach belonged to affluent artistic circles in New England, and achieved a level of success during her lifetime that was highly unusual for women of her generation. Her *3 Browning Songs* of 1899-1900 originated in a commission from The Boston Browning Society: for this, Beach selected the poem 'The year's at the spring' from Robert Browning's 1841 verse drama *Pippa Passes*. She completed two further Browning settings shortly after, and dedicated the cycle of three songs to the Society, which would later make her an honorary member. 'The year's at the spring' stands among Beach's most celebrated and recognisable works. Its appeal is clear: a gripping, triplet-driven piano part is joined by a vocal line replete with upward leaps, leading to ebullient final exclamation that 'all's right with the world'. The cycle as a whole contains ingenious harmonic interplay and a careful balancing of mood between the songs.

For Christmas in 1840, **Clara Schumann** surprised her new husband with the gift of three songs. It is evident from their joint marriage diary that Robert was delighted, both by the songs themselves and by the fact that Clara, who lacked confidence in her compositional abilities, had finally turned her hand to *Lieder*. In his enthusiasm, Robert suggested the couple embark upon a collaborative compositional venture, in which songs by husband and wife would be published side by side. Robert quickly produced nine settings from Friedrich Rückert's *Liebesfrühling* – a large collection of love poems – and encouraged Clara to begin her own. In June 1841, Clara composed her Rückert songs in time for Robert's birthday, and for her own birthday in September, Robert presented her with the published score, which became Clara's Op. 12 and Robert's Op. 37. The three Op. 12 *Lieder*, all exquisitely crafted and full of melodic and harmonic inspiration, work as well as a trio as they do within the context of *Liebesfrühling*. The lover's stormy arrival in 'Er ist gekommen' is scored with an urgent energy, pairing restless piano writing with highly-charged vocal lines. Gentle harmonic ambiguity is introduced over the course of 'Warum willst du and're fragen', while chromatic inflections add colour to the comforting, radiant setting of 'Liebst du um Schönheit'.

The 1890s saw the death of Clara Schumann after a long musical career, and, in Paris, the birth of **Lili Boulanger**, who would live only to the age of 24. In her short life, Boulanger produced a substantial and varied oeuvre, and is considered an important composer of early 20th-century *mélodie*. Amongst highly cultivated literary interests, she was particularly fond of symbolist writing, which is reflected in the choices of text for many of her vocal works. For *Clairières dans le ciel*, written in 1913-14, Boulanger selected 13

poems from *Tristesses* by Francis Jammes – a collection of intimate and melancholic reflections upon lost love; Boulanger's musical settings are sophisticated, aptly conjuring the full gamut of emotions that underpin Jammes's vibrant imagery. Five songs, drawn from across the cycle, are heard today.

To date, interest in **Alma Mahler's** biography has generally surpassed interest in her music. Her romantic liaisons with a string of cultural luminaries, coupled with her notoriously difficult personality, have led to the pervasive – and often sexist – characterisation of her as a 'malevolent muse' or 'femme fatale' of 20th-century artistic society. Born in 1879, Mahler was an ambitious composer: she studied with Alexander Zemlinsky and thrived within the vibrant musical milieu of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. However, shortly before her marriage to Gustav Mahler in 1902, she stopped composing at the request of her future husband. This blunt spousal suppression of creativity – which contrasts so starkly with the Schumanns' marriage dynamic – eventually became a source of regret for Gustav, whose belated interest in Alma's music led to the publication of five of her songs in 1910, but came too late to fully reignite her earlier ambition. In recent decades, prominent musicians have championed her extant early songs, and appreciation is growing of her distinctive compositional voice, which is full of harmonic adventure, carefully crafted dramatic tension and sensitive settings of texts from diverse poetic sources. 'Laue Sommernacht' and 'Ich wandle unter Blumen' were both published in 1910, while 'Licht in der Nacht' followed in 1915.

Finally we hear **Libby Larsen's** dramatic cycle *Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII*, written in 2000. Henry VIII's wives are often introduced to children through a mnemonic that reels off their fates: *divorced, beheaded, died; divorced, beheaded, survived*. Larsen humanises the women behind the first five of these fates – Katherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves, and Katherine Howard – by bringing together their final testimonies as recorded in letters and gallows speeches. Larsen's choice of subject places her within a long tradition of composers inspired by the political and personal dramas of the Tudor court, but while the stories of historical women are often mediated through narratives by men, here Larsen uses the queens' own words, and writes her music with a particular woman's voice in mind. The vocal writing is virtuosic, demanding and thrilling: Larsen describes it as 'a monodrama of anguish and power'. The music for each queen draws upon Larsen's research into their religious and cultural lives, and the score also contains evocative intertexts, most prominently in the incorporation of Elizabethan lute songs by Dowland, Praetorius or Campion: these are reimagined within both piano and voice parts, and are intended to offer additional, wordless commentary on the unfolding drama.

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Amy Beach (1867-1944)

3 Browning Songs Op. 44 (1889-1900)

Robert Browning

The year's at the spring

The year's at the spring
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hill-side's dew-pearl'd;
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn;
God's in His heaven –
All's right with the world!

Ah, Love, but a day!

Ah, Love, but a day,
And the world has changed!
The sun's away,
And the bird estranged;
The wind has dropped,
And the sky's deranged;
Summer has stopped.

Look in my eyes!
Wilt thou change too?
Should I fear surprise?
Shall I find aught new
In the old and dear,
In the good and true,
With the changing year?

Thou art a man,
But I am thy love.
For the lake, its swan;
For the dell, its dove;
And for thee – (oh, haste!)
Me, to bend above,
Me, to hold embraced.

I send my heart up to thee!

I send my heart up to thee, all my heart
In this my singing,
For the stars help me, and the sea, and the sea bears part;
The very night is clinging
Closer to Venice's streets to leave one space
Above me, whence thy face
May light my joyous heart to thee, to thee its dwelling place.

Clara Schumann (1819-1896)

Er ist gekommen Op. 12 No. 1 (1841)

Friedrich Rückert

Er ist gekommen
In Sturm und Regen,
Ihm schlug beklommen
Mein Herz entgegen.
Wie konnt ich ahnen,
Dass seine Bahnen
Sich einen sollten meinen Wegen?

He came
in storm and rain,
my anxious heart
beat against his.
How could I have known
that his path
should unite itself with mine?

Er ist gekommen
In Sturm und Regen,
Er hat genommen
Mein Herz verwegen.
Nahm er das meine?
Nahm ich das seine?
Die beiden kamen sich entgegen.

He came
in storm and rain,
audaciously
he took my heart.
Did he take mine?
Did I take his?
Both drew near to each other.

Er ist gekommen
In Sturm und Regen.
Nun ist gekommen
Des Frühlings Segen.
Der Freund zieht weiter,
Ich seh es heiter,
Denn er bleibt mein auf allen
Wegen.

He came
in storm and rain.
Now spring's blessing
has come.
My friend journeys on,
I watch with good cheer,
for he shall be mine wherever
he goes.

Warum willst du and're fragen Op. 12 No. 3 (1841)

Friedrich Rückert

Warum willst du and're fragen,
Die's nicht meinen treu mit dir?
Glaube nichts, als was dir sagen
Diese beiden Augen hier.

Why enquire of others,
who are not loyal to you?
Only believe what these
two eyes here tell you.

Glaube nicht den fremden
Leuten,
Glaube nicht dem eignen Wahn;
Nicht mein Tun auch sollst du
deuten,
Sondern sieh die Augen an!

Do not believe what strangers
say,
do not believe your own delusions;
nor should you interpret my
deeds,
but instead look at these eyes!

Schweigt die Lippe deinen
Fragen,
Oder zeugt sie gegen mich?
Was auch meine Lippen sagen,
Sieh mein Aug' – ich liebe dich.

Are my lips silent to your
questions
or do they testify against me?
Whatever my lips might say;
look at my eyes – I love you.

Liebst du um Schönheit **If you love for beauty**

Op. 12 No. 2 (1841)

Friedrich Rückert

Liebst du um Schönheit,
O nicht mich liebe!
Liebe die Sonne,
Sie trägt ein goldnes Haar.
Liebst du um Jugend,
O nicht mich liebe!
Liebe den Frühling,
Der jung ist jedes Jahr.

If you love for beauty,
O love not me!
Love the sun,
she has golden hair.
If you love for youth,
O love not me!
Love the spring
which is young each year.

Liebst du um Schätze,
O nicht mich liebe!
Liebe die Meerfrau,
Sie hat viel Perlen klar.
Liebst du um Liebe,
O ja mich liebe!
Liebe mich immer,
Dich lieb' ich immerdar.

If you love for riches,
O love not me!
Love the mermaid
who has many shining pearls.
If you love for love,
ah yes, love me!
Love me always,
I shall love you ever more.

Lili Boulanger (1893-1918)

From *Clairières dans le ciel* (1913-14)

Francis Jammes

Elle était descendue au bas de la prairie

Elle était descendue au bas de la
prairie
Et, comme la prairie était toute
fleurie
De plantes dont la tige aime à
pousser dans l'eau,
Ces plantes inondées je les
avais cueillies.
Bientôt, s'étant mouillée, elle
gagna le haut
De cette prairie-là qui était toute
fleurie.
Elle riait et s'ébrouait avec la
grâce
Dégingandée qu'ont les jeunes
filles trop grandes.
Elle avait le regard qu'ont les
fleurs de lavande.

She had reached the low-lying meadow

She had reached the low-lying
meadow,
and, since the meadow was all
a-blossom
with plants that like to grow in
water,
I had picked these flooded
flowers.
Soon, soaking wet, she reached
the top
of that blossoming
meadow.
She was laughing and gasping
with the gawky
grace of girls who are too
tall.
Her eyes looked like lavender
flowers.

Vous m'avez regardé avec toute votre âme

Vous m'avez regardé avec toute
votre âme.

You gazed at me with all your soul

You gazed at me with all your
soul.

Vous m'avez regardé longtemps
comme un ciel bleu.
J'ai mis votre regard à l'ombre
de mes yeux ...
Que ce regard était passionné et
calme ...

You gazed at me long like a blue
sky.
I set your gaze in the shade of
my eyes...
How this gaze was passionate
and calm...

Au pied de mon lit

Au pied de mon lit, une Vierge
négresse
fut mise par ma mère. Et j'aime
cette Vierge
d'une religion un peu italienne.
Virgo Lauretana, debout dans un
fond d'or,
qui me faites penser à mille
fruits de mer
que l'on vend sur les quais où
pas un souffle d'air
n'émeut les pavillons qui
lourdement s'endorment,
Virgo Lauretana, vous savez
qu'en ces heures
où je ne me sens pas digne
d'être aimé d'elle
c'est vous dont le parfum me
rafraîchit le cœur.

At the foot of my bed

At the foot of my bed, my
mother placed
a negress Virgin. And I love this
Virgin
with a faintly Italian religion.
Virgo Lauretana, standing on a
gold background,
you make me think of a
thousand *fruits de mer*
sold on quaysides where no
breath of air
stirs the flags which fall
listlessly asleep;
Virgo Lauretana, you know that
at such hours
when I feel myself unworthy of
her love,
it is your scent that refreshes
my heart.

Nous nous aimerons

Nous nous aimerons tant que
nous tairons nos mots,
en nous tendant la main, quand
nous nous reverrons.
Vous serez ombragée par
d'anciens rameaux
sur le banc que je sais où nous
nous assoierons.
Donc nous nous assoierons sur
ce banc tous deux seuls ...
D'un long moment, ô mon amie,
vous n'oserez ...
Que vous me serez douce et
que je tremblerai ...

We shall love each other

We shall love each other so, that
we shall be silent
as we hold out hands when next
we meet.
You will be shaded by old
branches
on the bench where I know we
shall both sit down.
And so we shall sit down on this
bench, we two alone...
For a long while, my friend, you
will not dare...
How gentle you will be with me
and how I shall tremble...

Si tout ceci n'est qu'un pauvre rêve

Si tout ceci n'est qu'un pauvre
rêve, et s'il faut
Que j'ajoute, dans ma vie, une
fois encore,

If all this is but a poor dream

If all this is but a poor dream,
and if I must,
once more in my life,
add

La désillusion aux désillusions;
Et, si je dois encore, par ma
sombre folie,
Chercher dans la douceur du
vent et de la pluie
Les seules vaines voix qui
m'aient en passion:
Je ne sais si je guérirai, ô mon
amie...

disillusion to disillusion;
and, if I must once more, in my
dark distraction,
seek in the sweetness of the
wind and rain
the only voices - unreal ones -
that adore me:
I do not know, my friend, if I
shall recover...

Alma Mahler (1879-1964)

Laue Sommernacht (1910)

Otto Julius Bierbaum

Laue Sommernacht: am Himmel
Steht kein Stern, im weiten Walde
Suchten wir uns tief im Dunkel,
Und wir fanden uns.

Mild summer night

Mild summer night: in the sky
not a star, in the deep forest
we sought each other in the dark
and found one another.

Fanden uns im weiten
Walde

Found one another in the deep
wood

In der Nacht, der sternenlosen,
Hielten staunend uns im Arme
In der dunklen Nacht.

in the night, the starless night,
and amazed, we embraced
in the dark night.

War nicht unser ganzes Leben
Nur ein Tappen, nur ein Suchen
Da: In seine Finsternisse
Liebe, fiel Dein Licht.

Our entire life – was it not
but a tentative quest?
There: into its darkness,
O Love, fell your light.

Ich wandle unter Blumen

(1910)

Heinrich Heine

Ich wandle unter Blumen
Und blühe selber mit.
Ich wandle wie im Traume
Und schwanke bei jedem Schritt.

I wander among flowers

I wander among flowers
and blossom with them;
I wander as in a dream
and sway with every step.

Oh halt mich fest, Geliebte!
Vor Liebestrunkenheit
Fall' ich dir sonst zu Füßen,
Und der Garten ist voller Leut!

O, hold me fast, beloved!
Or drunk with love
I'll fall at your feet –
and the garden is full of folk.

Licht in der Nacht (1915)

Otto Julius Bierbaum

Ringsum dunkle Nacht
Hüllt in Schwarz mich ein.
Zage flimmert gelb
Ferneher ein Schein.

A nocturnal light

Dark night all around
envelops me in black.
A hesitant yellow glow
shimmers from afar.

Ist als wie ein Trost,
Eine Stimme still,
Die dein Herz aufruft,
Das verzagen will.

As though bringing solace,
like a tranquil voice
summoning your heart,
when in despair.

Kleines, gelbes Licht,
Bist mir wie der Stern
Überm Hause einst
Jesuchrists des Herrn.

Little yellow light,
you are like the star to me
that once shone above the house
of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Und da löscht es aus.
Und die Nacht wird schwer.
Schlafe, Herz, du hörst
Keine Stimme mehr.

And now it is extinguished.
And the night grows heavy.
Sleep, O heart, you shall not hear
a voice again.

Lili Boulanger (1893-1918)

Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII (2000)

Katherine of Aragon

My Most dear lord, king and husband,
The hour of my death now drawing on, the tender love I owe you
forces me, ...to commend myself unto you and to put you in
remembrance of the health and welfare of your soul.... you have
cast me into many calamities and yourself into many troubles.
For my part, I pardon you everything, and I wish to devoutly pray
God that He will pardon you also. For the rest, I commend unto
our daughter, Mary, beseeching you to be a good father unto her.
...Lastly, I make this vow, that my eyes desire you above all
things...

Anne Boleyn

Try me, good king, ... let me have a lawful trial, and let not my
...enemies sit as my accusers and judges...

(Try me, good king,) ...let me receive an open trial for my truth
shall fear no open shame. ...never a prince had a wife more loyal
in all duty, ...in all true affection, than you have ever found in
Anne Bulen...

You have chosen me from low estate to be your wife and
companion... do you not remember the words of your own true
hand?

'...My own darling... I would you were in my arms... for I think it long
since I kissed you. My mistress and friend...'

Try me, good king.... If ever I have found favor in your sight- if ever
the name of Anne Bulen has been pleasing to your ears – then let
me obtain this request... and my innocence shall be...known and
...cleared.

Good Christian people, I come hither to die, ...and by the law I am
judged to die... I pray God save the King. I hear the
executioner's good, and my neck is so little...

Jane Seymour

Right trusty and Well Beloved, we greet you well...for as much as
be the inestimable goodness...of Almighty God, we be
delivered...of a prince, ...

'I love the rose both red & white.
To hear of them is my delight!
Joyed may we be,
our prince to see,
& roses three!'

Anne of Cleves

I have been informed...by certain lords.... of the doubts and
questions which have been ...found in our marriage...it may please
your majesty to know that, though this case ...be most hard ...and
sorrowful...I have and do accept [the clergy]for my judges. So
now, ...the ...clergy hath ...given their sentence, I ...approve... I
neither can nor will repute myself for your grace's wife... yet it
will please your highness to take me for your sister, for which I
most humbly thank you... Your majesty's most humble sister...
Anne daughter of Cleves.

Katherine Howard

God have mercy on my soul. Good people, I beg you pray for me.
By the journey upon which I am bound, brothers, I have not
wronged the King. But it is true that long before the King took
me, I loved [Thomas] Culpeper, ...I wish to God I had done as
Culpeper wished me, for at the time the King wanted ...me
(Culpeper) urged me to say that I was pledged to him. If I had
done as he wished me, I should not die this death, nor would he.
...God have mercy on my soul. Good people, I beg you pray for
me.... I die a Queen, but I would rather die the wife of Culpeper.

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