

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 22 October 2022
11.30am

Ludlow English Song Day I have twelve oxen

Natalya Romaniw soprano • Marta Fontanals-Simmons mezzo-soprano
Benson Wilson baritone • Iain Burnside piano

John Ireland (1879-1962)

The Bells of San Marie (1918)
The Trellis (1920)
Her Song (1925)
I Have Twelve Oxen (1918)
Santa Chiara (1925)
The Salley Gardens from *Songs Sacred and Profane* (1929-31)
Great Things (1925)

Eleanor Alberga (b.1949)

We Two (2022) *world première*

Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979)

The Donkey (1942)
Cradle Song (1929)
Eight o'clock (1927)
The cherry-blossom wand (1927)
The Tiger (1929-33 rev. 1972)

Eleanor Alberga

We Two

Liza Lehmann (1862-1918)

When I am Dead, My Dearest (1918)
Run, Run, Little Page (pub. 1895)
Mirage (1894)
Evensong (pub. 1916)
Snowdrops (pub. 1901)
Magdalen at Michael's Gate (1913)
Jim (Who ran away from his Nurse, and was eaten by a Lion)
from *4 Cautionary Tales and a Moral* (1909)

Lee Hoiby (1926-2011)

Bermudas (1983)

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30

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We begin this Ludlow English Song Day with a selection from the songs of **John Ireland**, whom one critic has described as 'perhaps the most important [composer] between Purcell and Britten' in the realm of English song. In 'The Bells of San Marie', we meet some of the sailors who brave the sea's changing moods, ringing the church bells in the French Mediterranean port town of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. A rapturous setting of Aldous Huxley's *The Trellis* follows, capturing a moment of intimacy between two lovers, hidden from prying eyes behind a thick-flowered trellis.

An admirer of the work of Thomas Hardy, Ireland undertook a few pilgrimages to Hardy's Wessex. 'Her Song' was written following the second of these, in 1925, and is a setting of a poem that perhaps invokes the ghost of the poet's first wife, Emma. She asks, without bitterness, whether the distant Hardy thinks of her, singing the song that she herself once sang.

In 'Santa Chiara' there is no hope of peace, even for a weekend. The symbolic, triumphal Palm Sunday procession of Christ returning home to Jerusalem brings feelings of bitterness, a return home being, for the singer, an impossibility. There is yet more heartbreak in 'The Salley Gardens'. We close this set with an exuberant celebration of 'Great Things': cider, dancing, and love; things to be recalled with joy at one's end.

New music has always been an important part of the Ludlow weekends. The first of today's premières is by Jamaican composer **Eleanor Alberga**. A pianist, former music director of The London Contemporary Dance Theatre and now co-director of the Arcadia festival, not far from Ludlow, Alberga's recent works have included commissions for the Royal Opera House and BBC Proms. Her new song, 'We Two', sets the opening lines of John Donne's poem, *The Ecstasy*. She writes, 'I was inspired by the poem because not only does it refer to human love, but it spoke to me of our divided nature, concerning the spiritual and mental, working in union.'

Whilst studying at the Royal College of Music, **Rebecca Clarke**'s tutor in composition, Charles Stanford, suggested that she should turn her performing skills from the violin to the viola. She went on to become an internationally renowned violist. In the wake of a busy performing schedule, though, her notable, and indeed award-winning, work as a composer of vocal and chamber music necessarily waned, before ceasing altogether upon her marriage in 1944.

Clarke's songs showcase her gift for atmosphere and drama. Her setting of GK Chesterton's *The Donkey* opens with echoes of the braying of the donkey in the piano, before the beast tells of its plight and of its one glorious moment on Palm Sunday. 'Cradle Song' is not a restful lullaby, its falling four-

note chromatic figure sowing unease, while in 'Eight o'clock', never was the chiming of the hour wrought with such drama as in this moment when a condemned man is about to be executed. There is some short-lived respite in 'The cherry-blossom wand', in a seduction of beauty that, once taken, can not last. The drama returns in Clarke's setting of William Blake's *The Tyger*, which is near terrifying in its depiction of the growls and snarls of the creeping tiger. The song occupied Clarke for several years, to the exclusion of much else, between 1929 and 1933, and again in 1972, when she revised the work.

After a decade-long career as a singer, in 1894 **Liza Lehmann** retired from singing to marry and to spend more of her time composing. As a composer, she gained an especial popularity for her lighter songs, but Lehmann also had a much deeper, more profound and contemplative side. We open with one such song; a setting of Christina Rossetti composed a year after Lehmann's eldest son was killed whilst training for service in the First World War, and not long before she herself died: the grief-stricken 'When I am Dead, My Dearest'.

One of the first works completed by Lehmann following her retirement from singing was 'Mirage', in which a wanderer in the east dreams of home and love. Having been a colleague to many singers of that time, it was natural that she went on to compose songs for some of those colleagues. 'Run, Run, Little Page', for instance, was written for baritone Harry Plunket Greene, and 'Snowdrops' for Clara Butt and her husband. Another such song was 'Magdalen at Michael's Gate', written for Nellie Melba in 1913. In it, a blackbird petitions Michael to allow Mary Magdalen entry into Heaven. Eventually, as the blackbird falls asleep, Michael relents and, rapturous, Magdalen enters through the gates. Lehmann regarded this as her favourite of all the songs she composed.

The final song in this selection gives a taste of the lighter side of Lehmann's work. One of a set of *4 Cautionary Tales and a Moral* to words by Hilaire Belloc, the poem's full title summarises the terrible tale that unfolds: 'Jim, Who ran away from his Nurse, and was eaten by a Lion'.

The late American composer **Lee Hoiby** stands alongside Samuel Barber in his lyrical approach to song, at times warm, joyous or whimsical. In his evocative setting of Andrew Marvell's 'Bermudas' we are taken on board a small boat riding the vast ocean. The rowers sing of tales of the sea, and of the lands and plenty that they might reach at their journey's end. In Hoiby's picturesque setting, we sometimes hear the regular knock of the oars as the rowers sing their song, keeping their rhythm and their spirits high as they undertake their journey of dream and hope.

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John Ireland (1879-1962)

The Bells of San Marie (1918)

John Masefield

It's pleasant in Holy Mary
By San Marie lagoon,
The bells they chime and jingle
From dawn to afternoon.
They rhyme and chime and mingle,
They pulse and boom and beat,
And the laughing bells are gentle
And the mournful bells are sweet.

Oh, who are the men that ring them,
The bells of San Marie,
Oh, who but the sonsie seamen
Come in from over sea.
And merrily in the belfries
They rock and sway and hale,
And send the bells a-jangle,
And down the lusty ale.

It's pleasant in Holy Mary
To hear the beaten bells
Come booming into music,
Which throbs, and clangs, and swells.
From sunset till the daybreak,
From dawn to afternoon,
In port of Holy Mary
On San Marie Lagoon.

The Trellis (1920)

Aldous Huxley

Thick-flowered is the trellis
That hides our joys
From prying eyes of malice
And all annoys,
And we lie rosily bowered.

Through the long afternoons
And evenings endlessly
Drawn out, when summer swoons
In perfume windlessly,
Sounds our light laughter.

With whispered words between
And silent kisses.
None but the flowers have seen
Our white caresses –
Flowers and the bright-eyed birds.

Her Song (1925)

Thomas Hardy

I sang that song on Sunday,
To which an idle while,
I sang that song on Monday,
As fittest to beguile:
I sang it as the year outwore,
And the new slid in;
I thought not what might shape before
Another would begin.

I sang that song in summer,
All unforgettingly,
To him as a new-comer
From regions strange to me:
I sang it when in afteryears
The shades stretched out,
And paths were faint; and flocking fears
Brought cup-eyed care and doubt.

Sings he that song on Sundays
In some dim land afar,
On Saturdays, or Mondays,
As when the evening star
Glimpsed in upon his bending face,
And my hanging hair,
And time untouched me with a trace
Of soul-smart or despair?

I Have Twelve Oxen (1918)

Anonymous

I have twelve oxen that be fair and brown,
And they go a-grazing down by the town.
With hey! with ho! with hey! with ho!
Sawest not you mine oxen, you little pretty boy?

I have twelve oxen, they be fair and white,
And they go a-grazing down by the dyke.
With hey! with ho! with hey! with ho!
Sawest not you mine oxen, you little pretty boy?

I have twelve oxen, and they be fair and black,
And they go a-grazing down by the lake.
With hey! with ho! with hey! with ho!
Sawest not you mine oxen, you little pretty boy?

I have twelve oxen, and they be fair and red,
And they go a-grazing down by the mead.
With hey! with ho! with hey! with ho!
Sawest not you mine oxen, you little pretty boy?

Santa Chiara (1925)

Arthur Symons

Because it is the day of Palms
Carry a palm for me,
Carry a palm in Santa Chiara
And I will watch the sea.
There are no palms in Santa Chiara
To-day or any day for me.

I sit and watch the little sail
Lean side-ways on the sea,
The sea is blue from here to Sorrento
And the sea-wind comes to me
And I see the white clouds lift from Sorrento
And the dark sail lean upon the sea.

I have grown tired of all these things,
And what is left for me?
I have no place in Santa Chiara
There is no peace upon the sea.
But carry a palm in Santa Chiara,
Carry a palm for me.

The Salley Gardens from *Songs Sacred and Profane* (1929-31)

WB Yeats

Down by the Salley Gardens my love and I did meet;
She passed the Salley Gardens with little snow-white feet.
She bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the tree;
But I, being young and foolish, with her did not agree.

In a field by the river my love and I did stand,
And on my leaning shoulder she laid her snow-white hand.
She bid me take life easy, as the grass grows on the weirs;
But I was young and foolish, and now am full of tears.

Great Things (1925)

Thomas Hardy

Sweet cyder is a great thing,
A great thing to me,
Spinning down to Weymouth town
By Ridgway thirstily,
And maid and mistress summoning
Who tend the hostelry:
O cyder is a great thing,
A great thing to me!

The dance it is a great thing,
A great thing to me,
With candles lit and partners fit
For night-long revelry.
And going home when day-dawning
Peeps pale upon the lea:

O dancing is a great thing,
A great thing to me!

Love is, yea, a great thing,
A great thing to me,
When, having drawn across the lawn
In darkness silently,
A figure flits like one a-wing
Out from the nearest tree:
O love is, yes, a great thing,
Aye, greatest thing to me!

Will these be always great things
Greatest things to me? ...
Let it befall that one will call
'Soul, I have need of thee':
What then? Joy-jaunts, impassioned flings,
Love, and its ecstasy
Will always have been great things,
Greatest things to me!

Eleanor Alberga (b.1949)

We Two (2022) *world première*

John Donne

Where, like a pillow on a bed
A pregnant bank swell'd up to rest
The violet's reclining head,
Sat we two, one another's best.
Our hands were firmly cemented
With a fast balm, which thence did spring;
Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread
Our eyes upon one double string.

Where, like a pillow on a bed
A pregnant bank swell'd up to rest
The violet's reclining head,
Sat we two, one another's best.
Our hands were firmly cemented
With a fast balm, which thence did spring;
Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread
Our eyes upon one double string.

Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979)

The Donkey (1942)

GK Chesterton

When fishes flew and forests walked
And figs grew upon thorn,
Some moment when the moon was blood
Then surely I was born.

With monstrous head and sickening cry
And ears like errant wings,

The devil's walking parody
On all four-footed things.

The tattered outlaw of the earth,
Of ancient crooked will;
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,
I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour;
One far fierce hour and sweet:
There was a shout about my ears,
And palms before my feet.

Cradle Song (1929)

William Blake

Sleep, sleep, beauty bright,
Dreaming in the joys of night;
Sleep, sleep, in thy sleep
Little sorrows sit and weep.

Sweet babe, in thy face
Soft desires I can trace,
Secret joys and secret smiles,
Little pretty infant wiles.

As thy softest limbs I feel,
Smiles as of the morning steal
O'er thy cheek, and o'er thy breast
Where thy little heart doth rest.

O! the cunning wiles that creep
In thy little heart asleep.
When thy little heart doth wake
Then the dreadful light shall break.

Eight o'clock (1927)

AE Housman

He stood, and heard the steeple
Sprinkle the quarters on the morning town.
One, two, three, four, to market-place and people
It tossed them down.

Strapped, noosed, nighing his hour,
He stood and counted them and cursed his luck;
And then the clock collected in the tower
Its strength, and struck.

The cherry-blossom wand (1927)

Anna Wickham

I will pluck from my tree a cherry-blossom wand,
And carry it in my merciless hand,
So I will drive you, so bewitch your eyes,
With a beautiful thing that can never grow wise.

Light are the petals that fall from the bough,
And lighter the love that I offer you now;
In a spring day shall the tale be told
Of the beautiful things that will never grow old.

The blossoms shall fall in the night wind
And I will leave you so, to be kind:
Eternal in beauty, are short-lived flowers,
Eternal in beauty, these exquisite hours.

I will pluck from my tree a cherry-blossom wand,
And carry it in my merciless hand,
So I will drive you, so bewitch your eyes,
With a beautiful thing that can never grow wise.

The Tiger (1929-33 rev. 1972)

William Blake

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare sieze the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

Eleanor Alberga

We Two

John Donne

Where, like a pillow on a bed
A pregnant bank swell'd up to rest
The violet's reclining head,
Sat we two, one another's best.
Our hands were firmly cemented
With a fast balm, which thence did spring;
Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread
Our eyes upon one double string.

Where, like a pillow on a bed
A pregnant bank swell'd up to rest
The violet's reclining head,
Sat we two, one another's best.
Our hands were firmly cemented
With a fast balm, which thence did spring;
Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread
Our eyes upon one double string.

Liza Lehmann (1862-1918)

When I am Dead, My Dearest (1918)

Christina Rossetti

When I am dead, my dearest,
Sing no sad songs for me;
Plant thou no roses at my head,
Nor shady cypress tree:
Be the green grass above me
With showers and dewdrops wet;
And if thou wilt, remember,
And if thou wilt, forget.

I shall not see the shadows,
I shall not feel the rain;
I shall not hear the nightingale
Sing on, as if in pain:
And dreaming through the twilight
That doth not rise nor set,
Haply I may remember,
And haply may forget.

Run, Run, Little Page (pub. 1895)

Clinton Scollard

Run, run, little page, tell my lady fair
That her lover waits by the turret stair;
That the stars are out, and the night-wind blows
Up from the path by the crimson rose.

Haste, haste, little page, ere the round moon's rim
Peeps o'er the edge of the forest dim,
And the breeze has died that seems to bear

The scent of the rose from the trellis there.

Soft, soft, little page, lest her sire should guess,
By her look of fear and fond distress,
That he hides in the night by the turret stair
Who would steal from his bow'r the flower so fair!

See, see, little page, who stands in white
All clad in pale and changing light,
Is't an angel? Aye, 'tis my lady fair,
And she hastes to her love down the turret stair.
Ah! my love!

Farewell, little page, far away, away,
Through the still black night to the dawn of day;
My lady sweet and I must fare
Till we reach the foot of my turret stair!
Farewell, little page, farewell.

Mirage (1894)

Henry Malesh

I hold thy hand, and straight from over sea
Troops of dear visions come;
The hot East passes, and I seem to be
Under cool skies at home.

I hold thy hand, and violets are born
And golden white daisies hide;
The drowsy poppy nods amid the corn,
The primrose nestles by the river side.

I hold thy hand, and memory spreads her wing
Till roaming sinks in rest;
Ah, let me hold it, sweet, till night shall bring
Oblivion on thy breast!

Evensong (pub. 1916)

Constance Morgan

Fold your white wings, dear Angels,
Fold your white wings;
Dew falls and nightingale softly now sings.
Across the lawn lie shadows, so still, so deep,
Dear loving Angels, pass not by,
Hush me to sleep.
Night falls, and whisp'ring goes the wind
Along the sea;
Fold your white wings, dear Angels,
Fold them, dear Angels,
Fold them round me.

Snowdrops (pub. 1901)

Annie Matheson

'It's rather dark in the earth today',
Said one little bulb to its brother,
'But I thought that I felt a sun-beam ray,
We must strive and grow till we find the way!
And they nestled close to each other.
And they struggled and toiled by day and by night,
Till two little snowdrops in green and white
Rose out of the darkness into the light,
And softly kissed one another.

Magdalen at Michael's Gate (1913)

Henry Kingsley

Magdalen at Michael's gate
Tirlèd at the pin;
On Joseph's thorn sang the blackbird,
'Let her in! Let her in!'

'Hast thou seen the wounds?' said Michael,
'Know'st thou thy sin?'
'It is evening, evening,' sang the blackbird,
'Let her in! Let her in!'

'Yes, I have seen the wounds,
And I know my sin.'
'She knows it well, well, well,' sung the blackbird,
'Let her in! Let her in!'

'Thou bringest no offerings,' said Michael.
'Nought save sin.'
And the blackbird sang, 'She is sorry, sorry, sorry,
'Let her in! Let her in!'

When he had sung himself to sleep,
And night did begin,
One came and open'd Michael's gate,
And Magdalen went in.

Jim (Who ran away from his Nurse, and was eaten by a Lion) from 4 Cautionary Tales and a Moral (1909)

(Joseph) Hilaire Belloc

There was a boy whose name was Jim:
His friends were very good to him.
They gave him tea, and cakes, and jam,
And slices of delicious ham.
They read him stories through and through,
And even took him to the Zoo-
But there it was the dreadful Fate
Befell him, which I now relate.

You know-at least you ought to know,
For I have often told you so-
That children never are allowed
To leave their nurses in a crowd;
Now this was Jim's especial foible,
He ran away when he was able,
And on this inauspicious day
He slipped his hand and ran away!
He hadn't gone a yard when - bang!
With open jaws, a lion sprang,
And hungrily began to eat
The Boy: beginning at his feet.
Now just imagine how it feels
When first your toes and then your heels
And then by gradual degrees,
Your shins and ankles, calves and knees,
Are slowly eaten, bit by bit.

No wonder Jim detested it!
No wonder that he shouted 'Hi!'
The honest keeper heard his cry,
Though very fat he almost ran
To help the little gentleman.

'Ponto!' he cried, with angry frown
'Let go, sir! Down, sir! Put it down!'

But when he bent him over Jim
The honest keeper's eyes were dim
The lion having reached his head
The miserable boy was dead.

When Nurse informed his parents they
Were more concerned than I can say:-
His mother, as she dried her eyes,
Said, 'Well-it gives me no surprise,
He would not do as he was told!'
His father, who was self-controlled
Bade all the children round attend
To James' miserable end,
And always keep a-hold of Nurse
For fear of finding something worse.

Texts continue overleaf

Lee Hoiby (1926-2011)

Bermudas (1983)

Andrew Marvell

Where the remote Bermudas ride
In th' ocean's bosom unespied,
From a small boat, that rowed along,
The listening winds received this song:

'What should we do but sing his praise
That led us through the watery maze
Unto an isle so long unknown,
And yet far kinder than our own?

Where he the huge sea-monsters wracks,
That lift the deep upon their backs,
He lands us on a grassy stage,
Safe from the storms, and prelate's rage.

He gave us this eternal spring
Which here enamels everything,
And sends the fowls to us in care,
On daily visits through the air;

He hangs in shades the orange bright,
Like golden lamps in a green night;
And does in the pomegranates close
Jewels more rich than Ormus shows;

He makes the figs our mouths to meet
And throws the melons at our feet;
But apples plants of such a price,
No tree could ever bear them twice;

With cedars, chosen by his hand,
From Lebanon, he stores the land;
And makes the hollow seas that roar
Proclaim the ambergris on shore;

He cast (of which we rather boast)
The Gospel's pearl upon our coast,
And in these rocks for us did frame
A temple, where to sound his name.

O! let our voice his praise exalt,
Till it arrive at heaven's vault;
Which thence (perhaps) rebounding, may
Echo beyond the Mexique Bay.'

Thus sung they in the English boat
An holy and a cheerful note,
And all the way, to guide their chime,
With falling oars they kept the time.