

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 23 June 2024
3.00pm

Ronan Collett baritone
Nicholas Rimmer piano

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Histoires naturelles (1906)

*Le paon • Le grillon • Le cygne • Le martin-pêcheur •
La pintade*

Hanns Eisler (1898-1962)

From *Hollywood Songbook* (1943)

*Wenn sie nachts lag und dachte • Mein junger Sohn
fragt mich • An den kleinen Radioapparat • In den
Weiden • Frühling • L'automne californien • Über den
Selbstmord • Die Flucht • Der Kirschdieb • Nightmare*

Charles Edward Ives (1874-1954)

Walking (c.1912)

Like a Sick Eagle (c.1909, rev. 1920)

The Cage (1906)

The Greatest Man (1921)

Afterglow (1919)

Watchman! (1913)

From "The Swimmers" (1921)

Louis Gruenberg (1884-1964)

From *Animals and Insects Op. 22* (1924)

*The Lion • An Explanation of the Grasshopper •
The Mysterious Cat • Two Old Crows*



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All songs are palimpsests of a sort: a layering of musical gestures, tones, instruments and voices on the printed text and all its meanings. But this afternoon's programme brings together a particularly richly layered succession of scrapbooks, poetic and personal, from the first half of the 20th Century.

We begin with **Maurice Ravel's** *Histoires naturelles* of 1906. This cycle of five songs sets prose portraits by Jules Renard, who wished to describe animals in a way that 'would make them smile' if the creatures themselves read them. Renard's *Histoires* were named for a much earlier source – the mighty 44-volume *Histoires naturelles* by the 18th Century scientist, the Comte de Buffon. The academic becomes charmingly personal in Renard; and Renard is vividly, magically realised by Ravel. The peacock struts elegantly to the echoes of a French Baroque overture, his tail feathers uncovered in a rainbow of pianistic *glissandi*, whilst the cricket ticks and chirps in the moonlight. Ravel's swan is a wickedly ironic reversal of Saint-Saëns's famous bird, its elegance and grace torpedoed in the final line. The kingfisher is the jewel of the collection, musicians and audience holding their breath together as the brilliant little bird rests on the speaker's fishing rod. The guinea fowl's grouchy, awkward screeching brings the set to light-hearted close. Ravel's setting caused no little scandal at its première, since he opted to keep silent the vowels traditionally sung in poetic French (thus 'nuage' is here a single syllable, rather than the traditional two-syllable 'nuag-e' as it might be in Massenet or Fauré).

A pupil of Arnold Schoenberg and close friend and collaborator of Bertolt Brecht, **Hanns Eisler** was an outspoken Communist who had earned fame and notoriety for his highly political theatre music and protest songs. After escaping the Nazi authorities for the US in the 1930s and spending several years in New York, he moved to Hollywood. From May 1942 until December 1943, as he struggled to adjust to his new life and found himself to be entirely at odds with the cinematic principles of Hollywood, Eisler kept a 'song diary': a huge collection of Lieder to texts by Brecht, Hölderlin, Mörike and others. The contents of this diary are now known as the *Hollywood Songbook*.

Our first two songs form a pair Brecht entitles *Der Sohn*, first a picture of terror and flight across the water, then a bleak game of question and answer. 'An den kleinen Radioapparat' is remarkably intimate, despite the high drama, emotional and physical, of the poem – the prospect of not being able to hear of the horrors that are occurring is somehow made infinitely worse than knowing. A superstition is roundly mocked for its pointlessness in the midst of such a broken world in 'In der Weiden'.

'Frühling' take us to Finland, which Brecht had visited en route to the USA; though spring provides no dynamism to Eisler's music until mention of the refugee's great task –

to hope. 'L'automne californien', with a text instead by Berthold Viertel, flips this on its head: Viertel actively looks forward to winter and the knowledge that his experiencing that climate again will be a sign of Germany's liberation. 'Über den Selbstmord' is a deeply touching lament, almost a lullaby for those who, Brecht tells us, may decide 'to throw their unbearable lives away'. We hear more of Brecht's escape to Finland in 'Die Flucht', and the touching care of 'friends I didn't even know yesterday'. A boy is left to forage from the speaker's garden in 'Der Kirschdieb'; whilst 'Nightmare' sets an English-language poem of Eisler's own, the rats jabbing and squealing across the piano keys.

Song was also an importantly confessional medium for **Charles Ives**, whose *114 Songs*, published in 1922, bring together a kaleidoscope of snapshots from a musical life – student assignments, family joys and sadness, and settings of many poets including the composer and his wife, Harmony. Like all of Ives's works, these songs often contain quotations and allusions of other music too, adding to the richness of the patchwork before us.

'Walking', to Ives's own words, stomps and strides across the land, the piano conjuring a funeral and later a dance as the singer continues ever onwards. 'Like a Sick Eagle' captures a moment of personal heartbreak: the grief of the Ives's losing their child (and Harmony's need for emergency surgery ending all hopes of their ever having a family). It is short, sinking, heavy and heartsore, the vocal line marked 'in a weak and dragging way'.

The tiger pacing 'The Cage' causes a little boy to ask sadly, 'Is life anything like that?'. But we meet a rather happier boy in 'The Greatest Man', a song of praise to his brilliant dad that rings with musical quotations ('I've been working on the Railroad' makes a marked appearance at one point) and filial pride. 'Afterglow' floats and shimmers, as if hinting at something out of earshot; and 'Watchman!', which is closely entwined with Ives's First Sonata for Violin and Piano, sets the hymn tune of that name against a subtly dislocated accompaniment. 'From "The Swimmers"' is a dangerously exciting portrait of a man ploughing through the teeming, surging waves of the sea.

The American composer **Louis Gruenberg** was a beloved pupil of Ferruccio Busoni and an enthusiastic promoter of the European avant-garde in the USA. In 1924 he composed the cycle *Animals and Insects* to poetry by Vachel Lindsay, who was particularly interested in writing texts for declamation and public performance. We hear four of the seven songs in Gruenberg's cycle, in which Lindsay's conversational tone shines through. Listen out for the growls of the lion, the chirping grasshopper... and above all, the remarkable buzzing and muttering of the bee and the crows!

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Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Histoires naturelles (1906)

Jules Renard

Le paon

Il va sûrement se marier
aujourd'hui.

Ce devait être pour hier. En
habit de gala, il
était prêt. Il n'attendait
que sa fiancée.

Elle n'est pas venue.

Elle ne peut

tarder.

Glorieux, il se promène avec
une allure de prince indien
et porte sur lui les riches
présents d'usage. L'amour
avive l'éclat de ses
couleurs et son aigrette
tremble
comme une
lyre.

La fiancée n'arrive
pas.

Il monte au haut du toit et
regarde du côté du
soleil. Il jette son
cri diabolique:

Léon! Léon!

C'est ainsi qu'il
appelle sa fiancée.

Il ne voit rien venir

et personne ne

répond. Les volailles

habituees ne lèvent même
point la tête.

Elles sont lasses de

l'admirer. Il

redescend dans la

cour, si sûr

d'être beau

qu'il est incapable

de rancune.

Son mariage sera pour
demain.

Et, ne sachant que faire du
reste de la journée,
il se dirige vers le
perron. Il gravit les
marches, comme
des marches de
temple, d'un pas
officiel.

Il relève sa robe à queue
toute lourde des yeux qui
n'ont pu se détacher
d'elle.

Il répète encore une fois la
cérémonie.

The peacock

He will surely get
married today.

It was to have been
yesterday. In full regalia

he was ready. It was

only his bride he was

waiting for. She has not

come. She cannot be

long.

Proudly he processes
with the air of an Indian
prince, bearing about
his person the
customary lavish gifts.

Love burnishes the
brilliance of his colours,
and his crest quivers
like a lyre.

His bride does not
appear.

He ascends to the top of
the roof and looks
towards the sun. He
utters his devilish cry:

Léon! Léon!

It is thus that he
summons his bride. He
can see nothing
drawing near, and no
one replies. The fowls
are used to all this and
do not even raise their
heads. They are tired of
admiring him. He
descends once more to
the yard, so sure of his
beauty that he is
incapable of
resentment.

His marriage will take
place tomorrow.

And, not knowing what
to do for the rest of the
day, he heads for the
flight of steps. He
ascends them, as
though they were the
steps of a temple, with
a formal tread.

He lifts his train, heavy
with eyes that have
been unable to detach
themselves.

Once more he repeats
the ceremony.

Le grillon

C'est l'heure où, las d'errer,
l'insecte nègre revient de
promenade et répare avec
soin le désordre
de son
domaine.

D'abord il ratisse ses
étroites allées de sable.

Il fait du bran de
scie qu'il écarte au
seuil de sa
retraite.

Il lime la racine de cette
grande herbe propre à le
harceler.

Il se repose.

Puis, il remonte sa
minuscule montre.

A-t-il fini? Est-elle cassée? Il
se repose encore
un peu.

Il rentre chez lui et ferme sa
porte.

Longtemps il tourne sa clef
dans la serrure
délicate.

Et il écoute: point d'alarme
dehors.

Mais il ne se trouve pas en
sûreté.

Et comme par une chaînette
dont la poulie grince, il
descend
jusqu'au fond de
la terre.

On n'entend plus rien.

Dans la campagne muette,
les peupliers se dressent
comme des doigts en l'air
et désignent la lune.

The cricket

It is the hour when,
weary of wandering, the
black insect returns
from his outing and
carefully restores order
to his estate.

First he rakes his narrow
sandy paths.

He makes sawdust
which he scatters on
the threshold of his
retreat.

He files the root of this
tall grass likely to annoy
him.

He rests.

Then he winds up his
tiny watch.

Has he finished? Is it
broken? He rests again
for a while.

He goes inside and
shuts the door.

For an age he turns his
key in the delicate
lock.

And he listens: nothing
untoward outside.

But he does not feel
safe.

And as if by a tiny chain
on a creaking pulley, he
lowers himself into the
bowels of
the earth.

Nothing more is heard.

In the silent countryside
the poplars rise like
fingers in the air,
pointing to the moon.

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

Le cygne

Il glisse sur le bassin,
comme un traîneau blanc,
de nuage en nuage. Car il
n'a faim que des nuages
floconneux qu'il voit
naître, bouger, et se perdre
dans l'eau.
C'est l'un d'eux qu'il
désire. Il le vise
du bec, et il plonge
tout à coup son
col vêtu de
neige.

Puis, tel un bras de femme
sort d'une
manche, il le
retire.

Il n'a
rien.

Il regarde: les nuages
effarouchés ont
disparu.

Il ne reste qu'un instant
désabusé, car les nuages
tardent peu à revenir, et,
là-bas, où meurent
les ondulations de l'eau, en
voici un qui se
reformé.

Doucement, sur son léger
coussin de plumes, le
cygne rame et
s'approche ...

Il s'épuise à pêcher de vains
reflets, et peut-être qu'il
mourra, victime de
cette illusion, avant
d'attraper un seul
morceau de
nuage.

Mais qu'est-ce que je dis?
Chaque fois qu'il plonge, il
fouille du bec la vase
nourrissante et ramène
un ver.

Il engraisse comme
une oie.

Le martin-pêcheur

Ça n'a pas mordu, ce soir,
mais je rapporte une
rare émotion.

Comme je tenais ma perche
de ligne tendue, un martin-
pêcheur est venu s'y poser.

Nous n'avons pas d'oiseau
plus éclatant.

The swan

He glides on the pond
like a white sledge,
from cloud to cloud. For
he is hungry only for
the fleecy clouds that
he sees forming,
moving, dissolving in
the water. It is one of
these that he wants. He
takes aim with his beak
and suddenly
immerses his snow-
clad neck.

Then, like a woman's
arm emerging from a
sleeve, he draws it back
up.

He has caught
nothing.

He looks about: the
startled clouds have
vanished.

Only for a second is he
disappointed, for the
clouds are not slow to
return, and, over there,
where the ripples fade,
there is one
reappearing.

Gently, on his soft
cushion of down, the
swan paddles and
approaches ...

He exhausts himself
fishing for empty
reflections, and
perhaps he will die, a
victim of that illusion,
before catching a
single shred of cloud.

But what am I saying?
Each time he dives, he
burrows with his beak
in the nourishing mud
and brings up a worm.

He's getting as fat as a
goose.

The kingfisher

Not a bite, this evening,
but I had a rare
experience.

As I was holding out my
fishing rod, a kingfisher
came and perched
on it.

We have no bird more
brilliant.

Il semblait une grosse fleur
bleue au bout d'une longue
tige. La perche pliait sous
le poids. Je ne respirais
plus, tout fier d'être pris
pour un
arbre par un martin-
pêcheur.

Et je suis sûr qu'il ne s'est
pas envolé de peur, mais
qu'il a cru qu'il ne faisait
que passer d'une branche
à une autre.

La pintade

C'est la bossue da ma cour.
Elle ne rêve
que plaies à
cause de sa
bosse.

Les poules ne lui disent rien:
brusquement, elle se
précipite et les
harcèle.

Puis elle baisse sa tête,
penche le corps, et, de
toute la vitesse de ses
pattes maigres, elle court
frapper, de son bec dur,
juste au centre de la roue
d'une dinde.

Cette poseuse
l'agaçait.

Ainsi, la tête bleuie, ses
barbillons à vif, cocardière,
elle rage du matin au soir.
Elle se bat sans motif,
peut-être parce qu'elle
s'imagine toujours qu'on se
moque de sa taille, de son
crâne chauve et
de sa queue
basse.

Et elle ne cesse de
jeter un cri discordant
qui perce l'air
comme une
pointe.

Parfois elle quitte la cour et
disparaît. Elle laisse aux
volailles pacifiques un
moment de répit. Mais
elle revient plus
turbulente et plus
criarde. Et, frénétique,
elle se vautre
par terre.

Qu'a-t-elle
donc?

La sournoise fait une farce.

He was like a great blue
flower at the tip of a
long stem. The rod bent
beneath the weight. I
held my breath, so
proud to be taken for a
tree by a kingfisher.

And I'm sure he did not
fly off from fear, but
thought he was simply
flitting from one branch
to another.

The guinea-fowl

She is the hunchback of
my barnyard. She
dreams only of
wounding, because of
her hump.

The hens say nothing to
her: suddenly, she
swoops and harries
them.

Then she lowers her
head, leans forward,
and, with all the speed
of her skinny legs, runs
and strikes with her
hard beak at the very
centre of a turkey's tail.

This poseuse was
provoking her.

Thus, with her bluish
head and raw wattles,
pugnaciously she rages
from morn to night. She
fights for no reason,
perhaps because she
always thinks they are
making fun of her
figure, of her bald head
and drooping tail.

And she never stops
screaming her
discordant cry, which
pierces the air like a
needle.

Sometimes she leaves
the yard and vanishes.
She gives the peace-
loving poultry a
moment's respite. But
she returns more rowdy
and shrill. And in a
frenzy she wallows in
the earth.

Whatever's wrong with
her?

The cunning creature is
playing a trick.

Elle est allée pondre son œuf à la campagne.	She went to lay her egg in the open country.
Je peux le chercher si ça m'amuse.	I can look for it if I like.
Elle se roule dans la poussière, comme une bossue.	And she rolls in the dust, like a hunchback.

Hanns Eisler (1898-1962)

From *Hollywood Songbook* (1943)

Due to copyright reasons, we are unable to reproduce the German texts by Brecht of the following songs

Wenn sie nachts lag und dachte	By night when she lay awake thinking
---	---

Bertolt Brecht

Wenn sie nachts lag und dachte Und ihr Sohn auf der grimmigen See! ...	By night when she lay awake thinking - her son out there on the wild sea! She could not get to sleep, her heart beat so loudly. When her son came to visit she stood all night next to his room throwing buckets of water at the wall, behind which her son lay, so that he might sleep, so that he might feel he was still out at sea.
---	--

Mein junger Sohn fragt mich	My young son asks me
--	---------------------------------

Bertolt Brecht

Mein junger Sohn fragt mich: Soll ich Mathematik lernen?	My young son asks me: do I have to study maths?
Wozu, möchte ich fragen. Dass zwei Stück Brot mehr ist als eines ...	What for, I want to ask. That two pieces of bread is more than one, that's something you'll soon see.
	My young son asks me: do I have to study English?

What for, I want to ask.
That empire is going
under. And
if you just rub your
stomach with your flat
hand and groan,
everyone will understand
you just fine.
My young son asks me:
do I have to study
history?
What for, I want to ask.
Learn to stick your
head in the sand
and then maybe you'll
survive.

Yes, study maths, I
say -
study English, yes, study
history!

**An den kleinen
Radioapparat**

Bertolt Brecht

Du kleiner Kasten, den ich
flüchtend
trug
Dass seine Lampen mir auch
nicht zerbrächen ...

To a portable radio

You little box which I
carried carefully as I
fled,
so that your valves
wouldn't break,
carefully from house to
ship, from ship to train,
so that I might still hear
my enemies speak

By my bedside and cause
me anguish
last thing each night and
first thing each
morning
about their victories and
my suffering:
promise me not to
suddenly go dead!

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

In den Weiden

Bertolt Brecht

In den Weiden am
Sund
Ruft in diesen
Frühlingsnächten oft das
Käuzlein ...

Among the willows

Among the willows on the
Sound
the owl calls often on
these spring
nights.
A peasant
superstition
says the owl comes
to tell
men
they don't have long to
live. I,
knowing that I have
spoken the truth,
need no Bird of Death
to bring me this
knowledge.

Frühling

Bertolt Brecht

Fischreiche Wässer!
Schönbäumige
Wälder!
Birken- und
Beerenduft! ...

Spring

Waters teeming with fish!
Forests of beautiful
trees!
Scent of birch and
berries!
Mellifluous wind bearing
a breeze
so sweet, as though the
iron milk-churns
rolling along from the
white farmhouse were
open!
Scent and sound and
sight and sense all blur
together.
The refugee sits beneath
the alders and takes up
once again his difficult
trade: hope.

L'automne californien

Berthold Viertel

Die Leiter blieb noch unterm
Feigenbaume stehen,
Doch er ist gelb und
schon längst
leergegessen
Von Schnäbeln und von
Mündern, wem's zuerst
geglückt.

Californian autumn

The ladder still leans
against the fig tree,
but the tree has turned
yellow, its fruit long
since eaten
by beaks and mouths
which got there
first.
If next summer sees it
green and heavily laden
with fruit,

Und kommt der Friede
unterdessen,
Mag es ein anderer sein, der
hier die Feigen pflückt.

and if peace has
meanwhile come,
someone else might pick
the figs.

Wir wären dann in
kältere Breiten
heimgegangen:
Da wächst kein Feigenbaum,
Aber der Wein.

We shall then have
returned home to a
colder climate:
no fig tree grows there,
but we make wine.

Fällt dort der Schnee,
Werden wir umso frischer
sein
Und gern im wieder befreiten
Winter wohnen.

If snow should fall there,
we shall be all the merrier,
happy to live in our
liberated winter.

Über den Selbstmord

Bertolt Brecht

In diesem Lande und in
dieser Zeit
Dürfte es trübe Abende nicht
geben ...

On suicide

In such a country and in
such a time
there shouldn't be
gloomy evenings
and high bridges over the
river -
even the hours between
night and morning
and the whole of
wintertime, it's all
dangerous.
In the face of all this
misery
in the blink of an eye
people might well
throw their unbearable
lives away.

Die Flucht

Bertolt Brecht

Auf der Flucht vor meinen
Landsleuten
Bin ich nun nach Finnland
gelangt. Freunde ...

The flight

Fleeing my countrymen
I have washed up in
Finland. Friends
I didn't even know
yesterday made up
beds for us
in clean rooms. Over the
loudspeaker
I hear the victory
reports of the vermin.
Curious,
I take another look at the
map. High up in
Lapland,
towards the Arctic Ocean,
I can still see a tiny
door.

Der Kirschdieb

Bertolt Brecht

An einem frühen Morgen,
lange vor Morgengrau,
Wurde ich geweckt durch ein
Pfeifen und ging zum
Fenster...

The cherry thief

Early the other morning,
long before it was light,
I was woken up to hear
whistling outside my
window
from up my cherry tree.
Twilight was filling the
garden.
There I saw a youth with a
patch in his pants
cheerfully plucking my
cherries. He noticed
me,
gave me a nod, and with
both hands
started stuffing cherries
from the tree into all his
pockets.
For quite a moment
longer, when I'd once
again got into my bed
I could hear him give his
gay little whistle.

Nightmare

Hanns Eisler

The rat-men accused me of not liking stench,
Of not liking garbage, of not liking their squeals,
Of not liking to eat dirt. For days they argued,
Considering the question from every angle,
Finally they condemned me. You don't like stench,
You don't like garbage, you don't like our squeals;
You don't like to eat dirt.

Charles Edward Ives (1874-1954)

Walking (c.1912)

Charles Edward Ives

A big October morning,
The village church-bells,
The road along the ridge,
The chestnut burr and sumach,
The hills above the bridge
With autumn colors glow.

Now we strike a steady gait,
Walking towards the future,
Letting past and present wait,
We push on in the sun,
Now hark! Something bids us pause...

But we keep on a-walking,
Tis not yet noon-day,
The road still calls us onward,
Today we do not choose to die
Or to dance, but to live and walk.

Like a Sick Eagle (c.1909, rev. 1920)

John Keats

The spirit is too weak – mortality
Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep
And each imagined pinnacle and steep
Of godlike hardship tells me I must die
Like a sick Eagle looking towards the sky.

The Cage (1906)

Charles Ives

A leopard went around his cage
From one side back to the other side;
He stopped only when the keeper came around with
meat;
A boy who had been there three hours
Began to wonder, 'Is life anything like that?'

The Greatest Man (1921)

Anne Timoney Collins

My teacher said us boys should write about some
great man,
So I thought last night 'n thought about heroes and
men that had done great things,
'N then I got to thinkin' 'bout my Pa; he ain't a hero 'r
anything but pshaw!
Say! He can ride the wildest hoss 'n find minners near
the moss down by the creek;
'N he can swim 'n fish, we ketched five newlights, me
'n him!
Dad's some hunter too, oh, my! Miss Molly Cottontail
sure does fly
When he tromps through the fields 'n brush! (Dad
won't kill a lark 'r thrush.)
Once when I was sick 'n though his hands were
rough he rubbed the pain right out.
'That's the stuff!' he said when I winked back the
tears.
He never cried but once 'n that was when my mother
died.
There're lots o' great men George Washington and
Lee,
But Dad's got 'em all beat holler, seems to me!

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

Afterglow (1919)

James Fenimore Cooper, Jr

At the quiet close of day,
Gently yet the willows sway;
When the sunset light is low,
Lingers still the afterglow;
Beauty tarries loth to die,
Every lightest fantasy
Lovelier grows in memory,
Where the truer beauties lie.

Watchman! (1913)

John Bowring

Watchman, tell us of the night,
What its signs of promise are:
Traveller, o'er yon mountain's height,
See that glory beaming star!
Watchman, aught of joy or hope?
Traveller, yes - it brings the day,
Promised day of Israel.
Dost thou see its beauteous ray?
Traveller, See!

From "The Swimmers" (1921)

Louis Untermeyer

Then the swift plunge into the cool green dark,
The windy waters rushing past me, through me;
Filled with the sense of some heroic lark,
Exulting in a vigor clean and roomy.
Swiftly I rose to meet the feline sea...
Pitting against a cold turbulent strife,
The feverish intensity of life...

Out of the foam I lurched and rode the wave
Swimming hand over hand, over hand, against the
wind;
I felt the sea's vain pounding, and I grinned
Knowing I was its master, not its slave.

Louis Gruenberg (1884-1964)

From *Animals and Insects Op. 22* (1924)

Vachel Lindsay

The Lion

The Lion is a kingly beast.
He likes a Hindu for a feast.
And if no Hindu he can get,
The lion-family is upset.

He cuffs his wife and bites her ears
Till she is nearly moved to tears.

Then some explorer finds the den
And all is family peace again.

An Explanation of the Grasshopper

The Grasshopper, the Grasshopper,
I will explain to you: -
He is the brownies' racehorse,
The fairies' Kangaroo.

The Mysterious Cat

I saw a proud, mysterious cat,
Too proud to catch a mouse or rat -
Mew, mew, mew.

But catnip she would eat, and purr.
And goldfish she did much prefer -
Mew, mew, mew.

I saw a cat - 'twas but a dream,
Who scorned the slave that brought her cream -
Mew, mew, mew.

(Unless the slave were dressed in style,
And knelt before her all the while -
Mew, mew, mew.)

Did you ever hear of a thing like that?
Oh, what a proud mysterious cat.
Mew ... mew ... mew.

Two Old Crows

Two old crows sat on a fence rail,
Thinking of effect and cause,
Of weeds and flowers,
And nature's laws.
One of them muttered, one of them stuttered,
One of them stuttered, one of them muttered.
Each of them thought far more than he uttered.
One crow asked the other crow a riddle:
The muttering crow asked the stuttering crow,
'Why does a bee have a sword to his fiddle?'
'Bee-cause,' said the other crow,
'B- B- B- B-cause,' -
Just then a bee flew close to their rail: -
Buzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz!
And those two black crows turned pale,
And away those crows did sail.
Why?
B- B- B- B-cause!
Buzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz...

Translations of Ravel by Richard Stokes from A French Song Companion (Johnson/Stokes) published by OUP. 'An den kleine Radioapparat' and 'L'automne californian' by Richard Stokes. 'Der Kirschdieb' by Agnes Headlam-Morley. All other translations by Jean du Monde.