

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 23 May 2022 1.00pm

Catriona Morison mezzo-soprano

Julius Drake piano

BBC
RADIO



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Dein blaues Auge hält so still Op. 59 No. 8 (1873)

Die Mainacht Op. 43 No. 2 (1886)

Mädchenlied Op. 107 No. 5 (1886-8)

Meine Liebe ist grün Op. 63 No. 5 (1873)

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

6 Gedichte von N Lenau und Requiem Op. 90 (1850)

*Lied eines Schmiedes • Meine Rose • Kommen und Scheiden •
Die Sennin • Einsamkeit • Der schwere Abend • Requiem*

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

Sea Pictures Op. 37 (1899)

*Sea Slumber Song • In Haven (Capri) • Sabbath Morning at Sea •
Where corals lie • The Swimmer*

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Although Lieder constitute a relatively small proportion of Brahms's output, song was the vehicle for some of his most private expressions of emotion. His investment in the form was intensified by his habit of setting poets he knew: of those writers represented today, Klaus Groth and Paul Heyse were personal friends, and Felix Schumann (youngest child of Robert and Clara) was his godson. Brahms's relationship with Felix's mother was famously complex, and his subsequent romantic entanglements were hardly happy or straightforward; it is revealing that the protagonists of many of his songs, including the first three heard this afternoon, reject (or feel rejected by) the possibility of fulfilment in love.

'Dein blaues Auge hält so still' describes the torment caused by a woman's beautiful eyes, and the poet's efforts to escape it; in 'Die Mainacht', the poet turns away from the possibility of romance represented by moonlight and cooing doves – the exquisite beauty of Brahms's settings only intensifies the sense of pain. In 'Mädchenlied', the protagonist is female but the sense of happiness denied is the same; Brahms's interruptions and variations of the spinning motif that runs through the accompaniment convey the pointlessness of the girl's task. Only in 'Meine Liebe ist grün' do we sense the possibility of love fulfilled: Brahms set Felix's text at Clara's request, and the result is a fitting response to the young poet's ardour as well as a homage to Felix's late father.

In August 1850, shortly after composing six settings of Nikolaus Lenau, the superstitious Schumann was shocked to discover that the Austrian poet had apparently died in the asylum where he had spent the eight years since his mental breakdown. Schumann quickly appended a requiem to the cycle, only to discover that the reports were false. However, on 25 August, during a private première of the cycle, Schumann learnt that Lenau had in fact died three days earlier. This coincidence 'put us all in a melancholic mood', as Clara recalled – but it also spurred Schumann to publish Op. 90, 'to furnish with this work a small monument to the unhappy but marvellous poet'.

'Lied eines Schmiedes' gives little hint of the torment to follow: taken outside its context within Lenau's epic *Faust* poem, the text's outlook is cheerful and straightforward, qualities to which Schumann responds at face value, while also imitating the blacksmith's hammering. The remaining poems reflect Lenau's unhappy experiences in love. In 'Meine Rose', the outward sense of ecstasy conveyed by the spacious melodies only partially conceals the melancholy that lies beneath; while in 'Kommen und Scheiden', Schumann evokes the poet's farewell to youthful hope by letting the vocal part trail off inconclusively, leaving the piano postlude to envision what might have been. 'Die Sennin' begins with rustic energy, matching the dairymaid's cheerful song, but loses momentum as the suggestion of mortality intrudes. The piano part of 'Einsamkeit' is restless and highly chromatic, expressing the

text's despair: the hint of major-key consolation at the end is illusory. 'Der schwere Abend' brings the cycle proper to a mournful close, the music's heavy tread matching the oppressive scene described by Lenau, but consolation of a sort is provided in 'Requiem', which sets an anonymous 'old Catholic text' in Latin, in which Héloïse and a chorus of monks bid farewell to Peter Abelard.

Few composers have enhanced their reputation among colleagues and audiences as dramatically as Elgar did with the 'Enigma' Variations in June 1899 and *The Dream of Gerontius* in October 1900. *Sea Pictures* was conceived and (mostly) composed between those two landmark successes, receiving its première in Norwich on 5 October 1899. The contralto soloist was Clara Butt – 'dressed like a Mermaid', as Elgar, who conducted, recalled. At the London première two days later, Elgar accompanied Butt at the piano, and he performed the piano version frequently thereafter, establishing it as a valid alternative to the more familiar orchestral score.

'Sea Slumber Song' begins in turbulent fashion: before the first vocal entry, and in interstices between them, we hear a sweeping quaver motif whose emphasis on the flat sixth undermines the song's surface calm. Depending on how we read Roden Noel's text, Elgar's music either undercuts the lullaby's tranquillity, or exposes the menace that lies beneath – is the 'sleep' that the sea offers really death? Ambiguity of a different sort pervades 'In Haven (Capri)', the one song drafted before 1899: Elgar's response to his wife's poem about love's enduring power is restrained, even formal, supporting biographers' suggestions that Alice's relationship to the composer, nine years her junior, was protective rather than passionate. 'Sabbath Morning at Sea' takes its mood, and some musical material, from 'Sea Slumber Song': setting Elizabeth Barrett Browning's metrically regular verses with remarkable freedom; Elgar builds to a blazing climax. The alternation between passion and restraint continues with the poised 'Where corals lie', setting Richard Garnett's poem about a sailor who rejects love to explore distant lands – the mirror-image of 'In Haven'? In 'The Swimmer', themes from earlier songs return, exemplifying the cross-referencing that became an Elgar trait. The rumbustious melodies do not conceal the song's darker implications: many have interpreted 'gulfs ... where no light wearies' as death, corroborated by the suicide of Adam Lindsay Gordon the day after publishing the text. Like the other writers set here, Gordon was scarcely a first-rate poet; this, together with the cycle's haphazard genesis (Elgar was late to decide on the 'sea' theme, Alice amending what was previously her 'Lute Song' accordingly), has provoked negative assessments. Yet although *Sea Pictures* may not display the consistent inspiration of the 'Enigma' Variations and *Gerontius*, its idiomatic vocal writing and solid musical architecture raise it to a level far above that of the poetry it sets.

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Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Dein blaues Auge hält so still Op. 59 No. 8 (1873)

Klaus Groth

Dein blaues Auge hält so still,
Ich blicke bis zum Grund.
Du fragst mich, was ich sehen will?
Ich sehe mich gesund.

Es brannte mich ein glühend
Paar,
Noch schmerzt das Nachgefühl:
Das deine ist wie See so klar
Und wie ein See so kühl.

Die Mainacht Op. 43 No. 2 (1866)

Ludwig Christoph Heinrich Hölty

Wann der silberne Mond durch
die Gesträuche blinkt
Und sein schlummerndes Licht
über den Rasen streut,
Und die Nachtigall flötet,
Wandl' ich traurig von Busch zu
Busch.

Überhüllet vom Laub, girret ein
Taubenpaar
Sein Entzücken mir vor; aber
ich wende mich,
Suche dunklere Schatten,
Und die einsame Träne rinnt.

Wann, o lächelndes Bild,
welches wie Morgenrot
Durch die Seele mir strahlt, find'
ich auf Erden dich?
Und die einsame Träne
Bebt mir heisser die Wang'
herab.

Mädchenlied Op. 107 No. 5 (1886-8)

Paul Heyse

Auf die Nacht in der Spinnstub'n,
Da singen die Mädchen,
Da lachen die Dorfbub'n,
Wie flink gehn die Rädchen!

Spinnt Jedes am Brautschatz,
Dass der Liebste sich freut.

Your blue eyes stay so still,
I look into their depths.
You ask me what I seek to see?
Myself restored to health.

A pair of ardent eyes have burnt
me,
the pain of it still throbs:
your eyes are limpid as a lake,
and like a lake as cool.

May night

When the silvery moon gleams
through the bushes,
and sheds its slumbering light
on the grass,
and the nightingale is fluting,
I wander sadly from bush to
bush.

Covered by leaves, a pair of
doves
coo to me their ecstasy; but I
turn away,
seek darker shadows,
and the lonely tear flows down.

When, O smiling vision, that
shines through my soul
like the red of dawn, shall I find
you here on earth?
And the lonely tear
quivers more ardently down my
cheek.

A young girl's song

At night in the spinning-room,
the girls are singing,
the village lads are laughing,
how swiftly the wheels go round!

Each girl spins for her trousseau
to please her lover.

Nicht lange, so gibt es
Ein Hochzeitgeläut.

Kein Mensch, der mir gut ist,
Will nach mir fragen;
Wie bang mir zu Mut ist,
Wem soll ich's klagen?

Die Tränen rinnen
Mir übers Gesicht –
Wofür soll ich spinnen?
Ich weiss es nicht!

Meine Liebe ist grün Op. 63 No. 5 (1873)

Felix Schumann

Meine Liebe ist grün wie der
Fliederbusch
Und mein Lieb ist schön wie die
Sonne;
Die glänzt wohl herab auf den
Fliederbusch
Und füllt ihn mit Duft und mit
Wonne.

Meine Seele hat Schwingen der
Nachtigall
Und wiegt sich in blühendem
Flieder,
Und jauchzet und singet vom
Duft berauscht
Viel liebestrunkene Lieder.

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

6 Gedichte von N Lenau und Requiem Op. 90 (1850)

Lied eines Schmiedes

Fein Rösslein, ich
Beschlage dich,
Sei frisch und fromm,
Und wieder komm!

Trag deinen Herrn
Stets treu dem Stern,
Der seiner Bahn
Hell glänzt voran!

Trag auf dem Ritt
Mit jedem Tritt
Den Reiter du
Dem Himmel zu!

It won't be long
before wedding bells sound.

No man who cares for me
will ask after me;
how anxious I feel,
to whom shall I tell my sorrow?

The tears go coursing
down my cheeks –
what am I spinning for?
I don't know!

My love's as green

My love's as green as the lilac
bush,
and my sweetheart's as fair as
the sun;
the sun shines down on the lilac
bush,
fills it with delight and
fragrance.

My soul has a nightingale's
wings
and sways in the blossoming
lilac,
and, drunk with fragrance,
exults and sings
many a love-drunk song.

Blacksmith's song

Fine little steed,
you'll soon be shod,
be frisky and good,
and come back again!

Carry your master
ever true to the star
that shines brightly
on his path!

With each step
as you go,
carry your rider
nearer heaven!

Nun, Rösslein, ich
Beschlagen dich,
Sei frisch und fromm,
Und wieder komm!

There, little steed,
now you're shod,
be frisky and good,
and come back again!

Meine Rose

My rose

Dem holden Lenzgeschmeide,
Der Rose, meiner Freude,
Die schon gebeugt und blasser
Vom heissen Strahl der Sonnen,
Reich' ich den Becher Wasser
Aus dunklem, tiefen Bronnen.

To spring's fair jewel,
to the rose, my delight,
already drooping and pale
from the heat of the sun,
I bring a beaker of water
from the deep, dark well.

Du Rose meines Herzens!
Vom stillen Strahl des Schmerzens
Bist du gebeugt und blasser;
Ich möchte dir zu Füßen,
Wie dieser Blume Wasser,
Still meine Seele giessen!
Könn' ich dann auch nicht sehen
Dich freudig auferstehen.

Rose of my heart!
You droop and pale
from the silent shaft of pain;
I would silently pour out
my soul at your feet,
as I pour water for this flower!
Even though I might not then
see you happily revive.

Kommen und Scheiden

Meeting and parting

So oft sie kam, erschien mir die
Gestalt
So lieblich, wie das erste Grün
im Wald.

Each time we met, the sight of
her
seemed as dear as the first
green in the wood.

Und was sie sprach, drang mir
zum Herzen ein
Süss wie des Frühlings erstes
Lied.

And what she said, pierced my
heart
as sweetly as the spring's first
song.

Und als Lebewohl sie winkte mit
der Hand,
War's, ob der letzte
Jugendtraum mir schwand.

And when she waved to me in
parting,
youth's last dream seemed to
vanish.

Die Sennin

The cowgirl

Schöne Sennin, noch einmal
Singe deinen Ruf ins Tal,
Dass die frohe
Felsensprache
Deinem hellen Ruf erwache.

Lovely cowgirl, sing once more
your song into the valley,
that the cliffs wake with joyful
speech
at your clear summons.

Horch, o Sennin, wie dein Sang
In die Brust den Bergen
drang,
Wie dein Wort die Felsenseelen
Freudig fort und fort erzählen!

Listen, girl, how your song
has pierced the heart of the
mountains,
how the souls of the crags joyfully
keep echoing your words!

Aber einst, wie Alles flieht,

But all things pass, and one day

Scheidest du mit deinem Lied,
Wenn dich Liebe fortbewogen,
Oder dich der Tod entzogen.

you will depart with your song,
when love has drawn you away
or death has claimed you.

Und verlassen werden stehn,
Traurig stumm herübersehn
Dort die grauen Felsenzinnen
Und auf deine Lieder sinnen.

And the towering grey crags
will then stand deserted,
sadly looking down in silence,
remembering your songs.

Einsamkeit

Solitude

Wild verwachs'ne dunkle Fichten,
Leise klagt die Quelle
fort;
Herz, das ist der rechte Ort
Für dein schmerzliches Verzichten!

A wild tangle of dark spruce,
the fountain's soft and ceaseless
lament;
heart, this is a fitting place
for your painful renunciation!

Grauer Vogel in den Zweigen,
Einsam deine Klage singt,
Und auf deine Frage bringt
Antwort nicht des Waldes
Schweigen.

A grey bird alone in the branches
sings of your sorrow,
and to your questioning
the silent forest brings no
reply.

Wenn's auch immer Schweigen
bliebe,
Klage, klage fort; es weht,
Der dich höret und versteht,
Stille hier der Geist der Liebe.

Even if silence reigned
forever,
continue, continue your lament;
the spirit of love blows silently here,
it hears and understands you.

Nicht verloren hier im Moose,
Herz, dein heimlich Weinen
geht,
Deine Liebe Gott versteht,
Deine tiefe, hoffnungslose!

Heart, your secret weeping
is not lost here amongst the
moss,
God understands your love,
your deep and hopeless love!

Der schwere Abend

The oppressive evening

Die dunklen Wolken hingen
Herab so bang und schwer,
Wir beide traurig gingen
Im Garten hin und her.

The dark clouds hung
so anxiously and heavy,
we both walked up and down
sadly in the garden.

So heiss und stumm, so trübe
Und sternlos war die Nacht,
So ganz wie unsre Liebe
Zu Tränen nur gemacht.

The night was so sultry and silent,
so gloomy and starless,
just like our love,
fit only for tears.

Und als ich musste scheiden,
Und gute Nacht dir bot,
Wünsch' ich bekümmert beiden
Im Herzen uns den Tod.

And when I had to leave
and bade you good night,
I wished us both dead
in the anguish of my heart.

Requiem

*Anonymous trans. Leberecht
Blücher Dreves*

Ruh' von schmerzreichen
Mühen
Aus und heissem Liebesglühen;
Der nach seligem Verein
Trug Verlangen,
Ist gegangen
Zu des Heilands Wohnung ein.

Dem Gerechten leuchten helle
Sterne in des Grabes Zelle,
Ihm, der selbst als Stern der Nacht
Wird erscheinen,
Wenn er seinen
Herrn erschaut in Himmelspracht.

Seid Fürsprecher, heil'ge Seelen,
Heil'ger Geist, lass Trost nicht
fehlen;
Hörst du? Jubelsang erklingt,
Feiertöne,
Darein die schöne
Engelsharfe singt:

Ruh' von schmerzreichen
Mühen
Aus und heissem Liebesglühen;
Der nach seligem Verein
Trug Verlangen,
Ist gegangen
Zu des Heilands Wohnung ein.

Requiem

Rest from pain-wracked
toil
and love's passionate ardour;
he who desired
blessed reunion in Heaven
has entered
the Saviour's dwelling.

For the righteous, bright stars
shine within the tomb,
for him, who will himself
appear as a night star,
when he beholds his Lord
in Heavenly glory.

Intercede for him, holy souls,
Holy spirit, let comfort not be
lacking.
Do you hear? Songs of joy resound,
solemn tones,
among them the lovely song
of the angels' harp:

Rest from pain-wracked
toil
and love's passionate ardour;
he who desired
blessed reunion in Heaven
has entered
the Saviour's dwelling.

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

Sea Pictures Op. 37 (1899)

Sea Slumber Song

Roden Noel

Sea-birds are asleep,
The world forgets to weep,
Sea murmurs her soft slumber-song
On the shadowy sand
Of this elfin land;

I, the Mother mild,
Hush thee, oh my child,
Forget the voices wild!
Hush thee, oh my child,
Hush thee.

Isles in elfin light
Dream, the rocks and caves,
Lulled by whispering waves,

Veil their marbles bright.
Foam glimmers faintly white
Upon the shelly sand
Of this elfin land;

Sea-sound, like violins,
To slumber woos and wins,
I murmur my soft slumber-song,
Leave woes, and wails, and sins.

Ocean's shadowy might
Breathes good night,
Good night...

In Haven (Capri)

Alice, Lady Elgar

Closely let me hold thy hand,
Storms are sweeping sea and land;
Love alone will stand.

Closely cling, for waves beat fast,
Foam-flakes cloud the hurrying blast;
Love alone will last.

Kiss my lips, and softly say:
Joy, sea-swept, may fade to-day;
Love alone will stay.

Sabbath Morning at Sea

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The ship went on with solemn face;
To meet the darkness on the deep,
The solemn ship went onward.
I bowed down weary in the place;
For parting tears and present sleep
Had weighed mine eyelids downward.

The new sight, the new wondrous sight!
The waters around me, turbulent,
The skies, impassive o'er me,
Calm in a moonless, sunless light,
As glorified by even the intent

Love me, sweet friends, this Sabbath day.
The sea sings round me while ye roll
Afar the hymn, unaltered,
And kneel, where once I knelt to pray,
And bless me deeper in your soul
Because your voice has faltered.

And though this sabbath comes to me
Without the stolèd minister,
And chanting congregation,
God's Spirit shall give comfort. He

Who brooded soft on waters drear,
Creator on creation.

He shall assist me to look higher,
Where keep the saints, with harp and song,
An endless sabbath morning,
And, on that sea commixed with fire,
Oft drop their eyelids raised too long
To the full Godhead's burning.

Where corals lie

Richard Garnett

The deeps have music soft and low
When winds awake the airy spry,
It lures me, lures me on to go
And see the land where corals lie.

By mount and mead, by lawn and rill,
When night is deep and moon is high,
That music seeks and finds me still,
And tells me where the corals lie.

Yes, press my eyelids close, 'tis well;
But far the rapid fancies fly
The rolling worlds of wave and shell,
And all the lands where corals lie.

Thy lips are like a sunset glow,
Thy smile is like a morning sky,
Yet leave me, leave me, let me go
And see the land where corals lie.

The Swimmer

Adam Lindsay Gordon

With short, sharp violent lights made vivid,
To southward far as the sight can roam,
Only the swirl of the surges livid,
The seas that climb and the surfs that comb.
Only the crag and the cliff to nor'ward,
The rocks receding, and reefs flung forward,
Waifs wreck'd seaward and wasted shoreward,
On shallows sheeted with flaming foam.

A grim, gray coast and a seaboard ghastly,
And shores trod seldom by feet of men –
Where the batter'd hull and the broken mast lie,
They have lain embedded these long years ten.
Love! when we wandered here together,
Hand in hand through the sparkling weather,
From the heights and hollows of fern and heather,
God surely loved us a little then.

The skies were fairer, the shores were firmer –
The blue sea over the bright sand roll'd;

Babble and prattle, and ripple and murmur,
Sheen of silver and glamour of gold.

So girt with tempest and wing'd with thunder,
And clad with lightning and shod with sleet,
And strong winds treading the swift waves under
The flying rollers with frothy feet.
One gleam like a bloodshot sword-blade swims on
The sky-line, staining the green gulf crimson,
A death stroke fiercely dealt by a dim sun,
That strikes through his stormy winding-sheet.

O, brave white horses! you gather and gallop,
The storm sprite loosens the gusty reins;
Now the stoutest ship were the frailest shallop
In your hollow backs, on your high arch'd manes.
I would ride as never man has ridden
In your sleepy, swirling surges hidden,
To gulfs foreshadow'd thro' strifes forbidden,
Where no light wearies and no love wanes.

Translations of Brahms and Schumann by Richard Stokes from The Book of Lieder published by Faber & Faber, with thanks to George Bird, co-author of The Fischer-Dieskau Book of Lieder, published by Victor Gollancz Ltd.