

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 25 February 2024
3.00pm

Roman Arndt tenor
Llŷr Williams piano

Georgy Sviridov (1915-1998)

6 Romances on Texts by Pushkin (1935)

*The woods have shed their crimson garb •
Winter journey • To My Nanny • Winter evening •
Foreboding • Driving towards Izhory*

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) 6 Romances Op. 73 (1893)

*We sat together • Night • On this Moonlit Night •
The sun has set • Amid Sombre Days •
Again, as before, alone*

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

Airs chantés (1927-8)

Air romantique • Air champêtre • Air grave • Air vif



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It is the middle of the 1930s. Stalin has consolidated his totalitarian rule. Dissent is crushed and waves of arrests are followed by summary execution or imprisonment in the harsh conditions of the camps. Socialist realism is imposed on the arts and censorship severely limits what artists can discuss. Yet it is precisely at this moment that a grandiose celebration of Russia's greatest poet is planned across the length and breadth of the Soviet Union. 1937 marks the centenary of the death of Alexander Pushkin, and composers rush to set his words to music.

One of these was the 20-year-old **Sviridov**, then a student at the Leningrad Conservatory. Born in the Kursk region in 1915, Sviridov moved to Leningrad in 1929, before taking lessons from Shostakovich in Moscow between 1936 and 1941. Although he would later complain of a lack of recognition, he in fact became one of the Soviet Union's most decorated composers (his rousing music for the 1965 film *Time, Forward!* became famous as the theme of a primetime Soviet news programme). His *6 Romances on Texts by Pushkin* date from 1935 and took the world of Russian music by storm.

For a work by such a young composer, the *6 Romances* are strangely solemn and philosophical. Rejecting the kind of love poetry that had been so central to Russian song, Sviridov instead selected a sequence of brooding, meditative texts that convey something of the poet's moods in the second half of the 1820s. In 1820, Pushkin had been exiled for four years to the southern regions of the Russian Empire on account of his political radicalism. He was then confined to his family's estate until 1826, before being allowed back to the capital under the direct surveillance of the tsarist authorities. The first five of Sviridov's songs find Pushkin in pensive mood, reflecting on his sense of isolation, the fading of his youthful dreams, and the uncertainty of the future, all set against the transcendent beauty of the natural world. Sviridov responds to Pushkin's poems with music that is bleakly haunting, looking back above all to Musorgsky, rather than Glinka, Tchaikovsky or Rachmaninov. Only the final song seems to offer any solace.

One of the most important aspects of Sviridov's cycle is its sense of dramatic coherence and narrative continuity. As archetypically Russian as it might sound, it clearly also harks back to German Romantic cycles by Schubert and Schumann. Similarly, in his *6 Romances* Op. 73, **Tchaikovsky** explored the possibility of fashioning a series of individual songs into a single, overarching whole. It was not the first time he had set words by just one poet – he had turned to verses by Grand Duke Konstantin Romanov in his *6 Romances* Op. 63, in 1887. But the Op. 73 songs are his first – and only – attempt at a cycle in any meaningful sense. They were also some of the

final works he completed before his sudden death from cholera in the autumn of 1893.

Although Tchaikovsky never met Daniil Rathaus, a young law student from Kyiv, their brief correspondence is surprisingly intimate. Rathaus had first written to Tchaikovsky in August 1892, enclosing a number of poems that he thought might be suitable for musical setting. It was not until late April and early May the following year that Tchaikovsky did so, and the resulting songs hint at artistic developments that were, sadly, to go unexplored. The cycle has a striking sense of thematic coherence, and the narrative of lost love that it traces is reinforced by the use of recurring set of musical motifs, as well as a carefully planned harmonic structure that binds its individual numbers into a satisfying whole.

The *6 Romances* were dedicated to Nikolay Figner, who had starred as Hermann in the première of *The Queen of Spades* in 1890, and there is certainly something theatrical about the emotional world they inhabit. But it is Tchaikovsky's correspondence with Rathaus that gives a clue to their significance. As he wrote to the young poet: 'I hate it when people try to peer into my soul. In my music I claim extreme sincerity; I am on the whole inclined to sad songs, yet at the same time, like you, at least in recent years, I want for nothing and can generally consider myself a happy person!' To read the *6 Romances* autobiographically would be to confuse art and life in a way that the composer always found irksome.

Sviridov clearly loved and revered Pushkin. Tchaikovsky found much to admire in Rathaus's student verse. **Poulenc** too had an extremely fine literary sensibility, yet he thoroughly detested the poetry of Jean Moréas, and in his four *Airs chantés*, set out to commit 'every possible sacrilege.' Moréas was, in fact, the French pen-name of the Greek-born Ioannis Papadiamantopoulos, whose poetry found little favour with the young iconoclasts of the 1920s. The *Airs chantés* date from 1927 and 1928, and in them, Poulenc does his witty best to go against everything the poems seem to cry out for. Jagged vocal leaps, breakneck speeds (the first is marked to be sung 'very fast with the wind in one's face'), deliberate infractions of the rules of French prosody, parodic allusions to the world of the cabaret and the musical hall – all these make for songs that demand as much of their audiences as they do of their performers. They were also a canny investment on the part of the composer. Poulenc had accepted a commission from the publisher François Hepp, who was rather fonder of Moréas than he was himself. An advance of 1000 francs and handsome royalties thereafter were the unexpected reward for such an ungallant *jeu d'esprit*.

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Georgy Sviridov (1915-1998)

6 Romances on Texts by Pushkin (1935)

Alexander Pushkin

The woods have shed their crimson garb

Ronyayet les bagryanyi svoi ubor,	The woods have shed their crimson garb,
Srebrit moroz uvyanuvshye pole,	the faded fields glint with silvery frost,
Proglyanet den kak budto ponevole	the morning light glimmers as if unwillingly,
I skroyetsya za krai okruzhykh gor.	before fading beyond the hills nearby.
Pylai, kamin, v moyei pustynnoi kelye;	May the hearth burn brightly in my solitary cell;
A ty, vino, osennei stuzhi drug,	and may wine, that friend of autumn's chilly days,
Prolei mne v grud otradnoye pokhmelye,	fill my breast with delightful intoxication
Minutnoye zabvenye gorkikh mukh.	and bring fleeting respite to my bitter woes.

Pechalen ya: so mnoyu druga net,	I am so sad: I have no friend here
S kem dolguyu zapil by za razluku,	with whom to drown long separation,
Komu by mog pozhat ot serdtsa ruku	whose hand I might shake with hearty cheer
I pozhelat vesolykh mnogo let.	and wish him many years of joy.
Ya pyu odin; votshche voobrazhenye	Alone, I drink; in vain my fancy
Vokrug menya tovarishchei zovyot;	summons up those comrades dear;
Znakomoye ne slyshno priblizhenye,	yet no acquaintance is to be heard approaching,
I milovo dusha moya ne zhdyot.	and my soul expects no cherished friend.

Winter journey

Skvoz volnistye tumany Probirayetsya luna, Na pechalnye polyany Lyot pechalno svet ona.	The moon steals through skeins of mist, bathing melancholy fields in melancholy light.
Po doroge zimnei, skuchnoi Troika borzkaya bezhit, Kolokolchik odnozvuchnyi Utomitelno gremit.	A sprightly coach rushes down the dreary winter road, a monotonous sleigh bell tediously rings out.
Ni ognya, ni chyornoj khaty, Glush i sneg... Navstrechu mne Tolko vyorsty polosaty	No sign of light or dismal dwelling, snow and wilderness are all I see... Striped and solitary mileposts are

Popadayutsya odne...	all that greet me on my way...
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Skuchko, grustno... Zavtra, Nina, Zavtra k miloi vozvratyas, Ya zabudus u kamina, Zaglyazhus ne naglyadyas.	I'm bored, I'm miserable... But tomorrow, Nina, I'll return to you, my beloved girl, dreaming by the hearthside, and gazing at you without cease.
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Zvuchno strelka chasovaya Mernyi krug svoi sovershit, I, dokuchnyikh udalyaya, Polnoch nas ne razluchit.	Sonorously, the clock's hands measure out the passing hours, midnight drives out unwanted guests, leaving the two of us alone.
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Grustno, Nina: put moi skuchen, Dremlya smolknul moi yamshchik, Kolokolchik odnozvuchen, Otumanen lunnyi lik.	I'm miserable, Nina: my journey is boring, my driver falls silent as he dozes, monotonous is the little bell, and the moon's face is wreathed in mist.
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To My Nanny

Podruga dnei moikh surovyykh, Golubka dryakhlaya moya! Odna v glushi lesov sosnovyykh Davno, davno ty zhdyosh menya. Ty pod oknom svoeyi svetlitsy Goryuyesh, budto na chasakh, I medlyat pominutno spitsy V tvoikh namorshchennykh rukakh. Glyadish v zabytye voroty Na chyornyi otdalyonnyi put; Toska, predchuvstviya, zaboty Tesnyat tvoyu vsechasno grud. To chudutsya tebe...	Companion of my bleak days, oh my dear frail sweetheart! Alone in the depths of the pine trees, you have long awaited my return. By the window of your room you grieve, as patient as a sentry, and with each passing minute, your knitting grows ever slower in your wrinkled hands. Through the abandoned gates you stare at the dark and distant road; sorrow, foreboding and concern oppress your heart at every hour. What visions do you see...
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Please do not turn the page until the song and its accompaniment have ended.

Winter evening

Burya mgloyu nebo kroyet,
Vikhri snezhnye
krutya;
To, kak zver, ona
zavoyet,
To zaplachet, kak ditya,
To po krovle
obvetshaloi
Vdrug solomoi zashumit,
To, kak putnik zapozdalyi,
K nam v okoshko
zastuchit.

The storm obscures the sky,
setting snowy gusts in
lively motion;
here it comes, howling
like a wild animal,
or sobbing like a little child,
or suddenly rustling the
thatch
on the dilapidated roof,
or, like some tardy traveller,
knocking on our window
pane.

Nasha vetkhaya lachuzhka
I pechalna i temna.
Shto zhe ty, moya starushka,
Priumolkla u
okna?
Ili buri zavyvanyem
Ty, moi drug, utomlena,
Ili dremlesh pod
zhuzhzhanyem
Svoyevo veretena?

Our ancient little hut
is sad and dark.
Why, grannie dearest,
are you so silent by the
window?
Has the storm's howling
tired you out, my dear?
Or are you dozing to the
humming
of your spindle?

Spoi mne pesnyu, kak sinitsa
Tikho za morem
zhila;
Spoi mne pesnyu, kak
devitsa
Za vodoi poutru
shla.
Vypyem, dobraya podruzhka
Bednoi yunosti moyei,
Vypyem s gorya; gde zhe
kruzhka?
Serdtsu budet
velesej.

Oh sing to me of the blue tit
who lived in peace far
beyond the sea;
oh sing to me of the
maiden fair
who fetched water at
morning light.
Let's drink, my dear,
to my poor youth,
let's drink with bitterness;
where's the tankard?
That at least will ease the
heart.

Foreboding

Snova tuchi nado mnoyu
Sobralisya v
tishine;
Rok zavistliviy bedoyu
Ugrozhayet snova
mne...
Sokhranyu I k sudbe
prezrenye?
Ponesu I navstrechu
yei
Nepreklonnost i terpenye
Gordoi yunosti moyei?

Once again, storm clouds
have silently gathered
above me;
fate jealously threatens me
with misfortunes once
again...
Will I maintain my
contempt for destiny?
Will I bring to bear
against it
the tenacity and patience
of my proud youth?

Burnoi zhiznyu
utomlyonnyi,
Ravnodushno buri
zhdu:

Exhausted by life's
stormy course,
I await the storm with
equanimity:

Mozhet byt, yeshchyo,
spasyonnyi,
Snova pristan ya
najdu...
No, predchuvstvuya
razluku,
Neizbezhnyi, grozny
chas,
Szhat tvoyu, moi angel,
ruku
Ya speshu v poslednii raz.

perhaps I will be saved
this time too,
finding safe harbour once
again...
But full of forebodings of
our parting,
of the inescapable, awful
hour,
I rush to press your hand,
my angel,
for one last time.

Angel krotkii,
bezmyatezhnyi,
Tikho molvi mne: prosti,
Opechalsya: vzor svoi
nezhnyi
Podymi il
opusti;
I tvoyo vospominanye
Zamenit dushe moei
Silu, gordost,
upovanye
I otvagu yunykh
dnei.

My serene and timid
angel,
I bid you quietly say farewell,
let sadness fill your soul
as you look on me,
or as you lower your
tender gaze;
and the recollection of you
will fill my soul,
in place of the strength,
the pride,
the hope and valour of
my youthful days.

Driving towards Izhory

Podyezzhaya pod Izhory
Ya vzglyanul na nebesa
I vspomnil nashi vzory,
Vashi siniye glaza.
Khot ya grustno
ocharovan
Vashei devstvennoi krasoi,
Khot vampirom
imenovan
Ya v gubernii Tverskoi,
No kolen moikh pred vami
Preklonit ya ne posmel
I vlyublyennymi molbami
Vas trevozhit ne khotel.
Upivayas
nepriyatno
Khmelem svetskoi
suyety,
Pozabudu, veroyatno,
Vashi milye cherty,
Lyogkii stan, dvizhenii
stroinost,
Ostorozhnyi razgovor,
Etu skromnyu spokoinost,
Khitryi smekh i khitryi zvor.
Yesli zhe net... po prezhnyu
sled
V vashi mirnye kraya
Cherez god opyat zayedu
I vlyublyus do
noyabyra.

Driving towards Izhory
I looked up at the heavens
and recalled our glances
and your blue eyes.
Even though I am sadly
enchanted
by your maidenly beauty,
even though they call me
a vampire
in the province of Tver,
I did not dare
to kneel before you,
did not wish to trouble you
with protestations of love.
Coldly drowning my
sorrows
in the intoxication of vain
society,
I may well forget
your dear features,
your gentle form, graceful
gestures,
cautious conversation,
that unruffled modest,
sly laughter and sly glance.
And if not... may my
former steps
bring me back next year
to your peaceful parts
where I shall fall in love
until November.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

6 Romances Op. 73 (1893)

Daniil Rathaus

We sat together

My sideli s toboi u zasnuvshei reki.	We sat together by the still river.
S tikhoi pesnei proplyli domoi rybaki.	With a quiet song the fishermen rowed home.
Solntsa luch zolotoi za rekoii dogoral.	Across the river the gold ray of the sun was dying out.
I tebe ya togda nichego ne skazal.	And all that time I said nothing to you.
Zagremelo vdali, nadvigalas groza,	There was distant thunder as a storm moved in,
Po resnitsam tvoim pokatilas sleza.	a tear rolled down your eyelashes.
I s bezumnym rydanyem k tebe ya pripal,	And sobbing madly I fell at your feet,
I tebe nichego, nichego ne skazal.	and said nothing to you, nothing at all.
I teper, v eti dni, ya, kak prezhde, odin,	And now once again, as before, I'm alone,
Uzh ne zhdu nichego ot gryadushchikh godin.	no longer expecting anything from the coming years.
V serdtse zhiznennyi zvuk ush davno otzvuchal...	In my heart all cries of life long ago died out...
Akh, zachem, akh, zachem, ya tebe nichego, nichego ne skazal!	Oh why, oh why, did I say nothing to you, nothing at all!

Night

Merknet slabyi svet svechi,	Dim grows the weak light of the candle,
Brodit mrak unyli	beyond roams wretched darkness,
I toska szhimayet grud,	and my heart's gripped by longing
S neponyatnoi siloi.	strong past understanding.
Na pechalnye glaza Tikho son niskhodit,	Eyes filled with sorrow yield to sleep's quiet descent,
I s proshedshim v etot mig	and at this moment, with the past,
Rech dusha zavodit.	my soul starts a conversation.
Istomilasya ona Gorestyu glubokoi, Poyavis zhe, khot vo sne,	It is weary and worn out with sadness profound; appear now, if only in a dream,
O, moi drug dalyokii!	oh, my friend far away!

On this Moonlit Night

V etu lunnuyu noch, v etu divnuyu noch,	On this moonlit night, on this wondrous night,
V etot mig blagodatnyi svidanya,	in this blessed moment of being together,
O, moi drug, ya ne v silakh lyubvi prevozmoch,	O my friend! I cannot contain my love,
Uderzhat ya ne v silakh priznanya!	I cannot hold back this declaration.
V serebre chut kolyshetsya ozera glad...	The smooth silver lake is slightly stirring,
Naklonyas, zasheptalisya ivy...i...	bending down, the willows start to whisper...
No bessilny slova! Kak tebe peredat	But words are powerless! - how can I convey
Istomlyonnovo serdtsa poryvny?	the thrills my exhausted heart feels?
Noch ne zhdyot, noch letit... Zakatilas luna...	Night won't wait, it flies... the moon is down...
Zaalelo v tainstvennoi dali...	the sky glows red in the mysterious distance...
Dorogaya, prosti! Snova zhizni volna	Darling! Forgive me, - again life's wave
Nam nesyyot den toski i pechali!	is bringing us a day of longing and sorrow.

The sun has set

Zakatilos solntse, zaigrali kraski	The sun has set, a play of colour has begun,
Lyogkoi pozolotoi v sineve nebes.	light streaks of gold in a dark blue sky.
V obayanye nochi sladostrastnoi laski	In the magic of night's voluptuous caress
Tikho shto-to shepchet zadremavshii les.	the sleeping forest whispers something softly.
I v dushe trevozhnoi umolkayut muki	And torments in an anxious soul subside,
I dyshat vseii grudyu v etu noch legko.	and tonight one's whole being breathes easier.
Nochi divnoi teni, nochi divnoi zvuki,	Shadows of this wondrous night, sounds of this wondrous night,
Nas s toboi unosyat, drug moi, dalyoko...	carry the two of us, my friend, far away...
Vsya obyata negoi etoi nochi strastnoi,	Wrapped in night's passionate languor,
Ty ko mne sklonilas na plecho glavoi...	you lean your head on my shoulder...
Ya bezumno schastliv, o moi drug prekrasnyi,	I'm insanely happy, oh my friend so lovely,
Beskonechno schastliv v etu noch s toboi!	boundlessly happy on this night with you!

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

Amid Sombre Days

Sred mrachnykh dnei, pod
gnyotom bed,
Iz mgly tumannoi proshlykh
let,
Kak otblesk radostnykh
luchei,
Mne svetit vzor tvoikh
ochei.

On gloomy days, when
cares oppress,
out of the vague dimness
of the past,
like rays of light bringing
gladness,
the gaze of your eyes
shines on me.

Pod obayanyem svetlykh
snov
Mne mnitsya, – ya s tobou
vnov.
Pri svete dnya, v nochnoi
tishi
Delyus vostorgami
dushi.

Under this spell of bright
dreams,
I imagine being with you
once more.
In the light of day, in the
still of night,
again I know these
raptures of the soul.

Ya vnov s toboi! – moy
pechal
Umchalas v pasmurnuyu
dal...
I strastno vnov khochu ya
zhit –
Toboi dyshat, tebya
lyubit!

I am with you once more!
– my sadness
has vanished in a gray
distance...
And again I passionately
want to live –
with you each breath I
take, with you to love!

Again, as before, alone

Snova, kak prezhde, odin,
Snova obyat ya toskoi.
Smotritsya topol v
okno,
Ves ozaryonnyi lunoi.

Again, as before, I'm alone,
again I'm filled with longing.
A poplar stands by the
window,
flooded with moonlight.

Smotritsya topol v
okno,
Shepchut o chyom-to
listy.
V zvyozdakh goryat
nebesa ...
Gde teper, milaya,
ty?

A poplar stands by the
window,
the leaves are whispering
about something.
The sky is aflame with
stars ...
Where now, darling, are
you?

Vsyo, chto tvoritsya so mnoi,
Ya peredat ne berus...
Drug! pomolis za menya,
Ya za tebya uzh molyus.

I couldn't begin to tell you
all that's happening to me ...
Friend! Say a prayer for me,
I am praying for you.

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

Airs chantés (1927-8)

Jean Moréas

Air romantique

J'allais dans la campagne
avec le vent d'orage,
Sous le pâle matin, sous les
nuages bas,
Un corbeau ténébreux
escortait mon voyage
Et dans les flaques d'eau
retentissaient mes
pas.

Romantic Air

I walked in the countryside
with the stormy wind,
beneath the pale morning,
beneath the low clouds,
a sinister crow followed
me on my way
and my steps splashed
though the water
puddles.

La foudre à l'horizon faisait
courir sa flamme
Et l'Aquilon doublait ses
longs gémissements;
Mais la tempête était trop
faible pour mon âme,
Qui couvrait le tonnerre avec
ses battements.

The lightning on the horizon
unleashed its flame
and the North Wind
intensified its wailing;
but the storm was too
weak for my soul
which drowned the thunder
with its throbbing.

De la dépouille d'or du frêne
et de l'érable
L'Automne composait son
éclatant butin,
Et le corbeau toujours, d'un
vol inexorable,
M'accompagnait sans
rien changer à mon
destin.

From the golden spoils of
ash and maple
Autumn amassed her
brilliant plunder,
and the crow still, with
inexorable flight,
without changing
anything, accompanied
me to my fate.

Air champêtre

Belle source, je veux me
rappeler sans cesse,
Qu'un jour guidé par l'amitié
Ravi,
J'ai contemplé ton visage, ô
déesse,
Perdu sous la mousse à
moitié.

Pastoral Air

Lovely spring, I shall never
cease to remember
that on a day, guided by
entranced friendship,
I gazed on your face, O
goddess,
half hidden beneath the
moss.

Que n'est-il demeuré, cet
ami que je pleure,
O nymphe, à ton culte
attaché,
Pour se mêler encore
au souffle qui
t'effleure
Et répondre à ton flot
caché.

Had he but remained, this
friend whom I mourn,
O nymph, a devotee of
your cult,
to mingle once more with
the breeze that
caresses you,
and to respond to your
hidden waters!

Air grave

Ah! fuyez à présent,
Malheureuses pensées!
O! colère, ô remords!
Souvenirs qui m'avez
Les deux tempes pressées,
De l'etreuse des
morts.

Sentiers de mousse pleins,
Vaporeuses fontaines,
Grottes profondes, voix
Des oiseaux et du vent
Lumières incertaines
Des sauvages sous-bois.

Insectes, animaux,
Beauté future,
Ne me repousse pas
O divine nature,
Je suis ton suppliant

Ah! fuyez à présent,
Colère, remords!

Grave Air

Ah! begone now,
unhappy thoughts!
O anger! O remorse!
Memories that oppressed
my two temples
with the embrace of the
dead.

Paths full of moss,
vaporous fountains,
deep grottoes, voices
of birds and wind,
fitful lights
of the wild undergrowth.

Insects, animals,
beauty to come –
do not repulse me,
O divine nature,
I am your suppliant.

Ah! begone now,
anger, remorse!

Air vif

Le trésor du verger
et le jardin en
fête,
Les fleurs des champs, des
bois
Eclatent de plaisir
Hélas! et sur leur tête le vent
enfle sa voix.

Mais toi, noble océan
Que l'assaut des tourmentes
Ne saurait ravager,
Certes plus dignement
lorsque tu te lamentes
Tu te prends à
songer.

Lively Air

The treasures of the
orchard and the festive
garden,
the flowers of the field, of
the woods
burst forth with pleasure
alas! and above their head
the wind swells its voice.

But you, noble ocean
whom the assault of storms
cannot ravage,
you will assuredly, with
more dignity,
lose yourself in dreams
when you lament.