

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 25 May 2024
7.30pm

Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective

Francesca Chiejina soprano
Elena Urioste violin
Savitri Grier violin
Juan-Miguel Hernandez viola
Edgar Francis viola
Laura van der Heijden cello
Tony Rymer cello

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) String Quintet in C Op. 29 (1801)
*I. Allegro moderato • II. Adagio molto espressivo •
III. Scherzo. Allegro • IV. Presto*

Alma Mahler (1879-1964) Die stille Stadt (pub.1910)
Laue Sommernacht (pub.1910)
Bei dir ist es traut (pub.1910)
Erntelied (1915)
*all arranged by Tom Poster for soprano and string
sextet*

Interval

Alexander Zemlinsky (1871-1942) Maiblumen blühten überall for voice and string sextet (c.1898)

Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) Verklärte Nacht Op. 4 (1899)

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Dating from 1801, the year after the First Symphony and Op. 18 quartets, **Beethoven's** sole String Quintet is a strangely neglected masterpiece. Like Mozart in his quintets, Beethoven adds a second viola to the string quartet; and with the enriched texture goes an amplitude of scale and harmonic range. Opening with a noble violin theme, the first movement trades on the contrast between broad, lyrical melody and a skittering triplet theme. Tonally this is one of the most adventurous movements in early Beethoven. The *dolce* second theme, unfolding in graceful imitation, appears not in the expected (in 1801) G major but in the more distant key of A major – a luminous contrast to the home key of C major.

Few Beethoven movements display such sensuous delight in colour as the *Adagio molto espressivo*. With a nod to Mozart, the whole movement – opera by other means – is a luxurious outpouring of ornate, Italianate melody. When the main theme returns, it is gorgeously rescored, with the second violin playing pizzicato, like a serenading mandolin.

In the lolling *Scherzo* Beethoven makes comic capital out of the insistent arpeggio figure heard in the opening bar. The trio begins airily, then plunges into rowdy rusticity, complete with bagpipe drones and stomping offbeat accents. In Germany and Austria the finale is known as 'Der Sturm'. Shuddering tremolos and 'lightning flashes' explain why. The music slews round to the unexpected key of A flat for a bucolic contrasting theme. Then, out of the blue, Beethoven introduces a tongue-in-cheek parody of a courtly minuet whose key, A major, had played a crucial role in the first movement. The 'storm' returns, followed by a varied repeat of the minuet and a coda that, like the bucolic theme, veers to A flat major: a final confirmation that the colour contrast between keys a third apart is a prime structural feature of this marvellously inventive work.

The talented and charismatic **Alma Mahler** (née Schindler) studied composition with Zemlinsky in Vienna, had an affair with him, then ditched him unceremoniously for Gustav Mahler. Before their marriage in 1902, Mahler made it clear that there was only room for one composer in the family, and it wasn't her. Only in 1910, during a crisis in their marriage, did he finally relent and arrange for publication of a group of Alma's songs, including 'Bei dir ist es traut', 'Laue Sommernacht' and 'Die stille Stadt'. 'Erntelied' was one of four songs published in 1915, the year of Alma's marriage to the architect Walter Gropius.

Arranged by **Tom Poster** for voice and string sextet, these songs from around 1900 breathe a *fin de siècle* Viennese sensibility, with their wayward, rhapsodic melodic lines and luxuriant chromatic harmony. Wagner and Zemlinsky, rather than Gustav Mahler, are prime influences, most obviously in the languorous setting of Richard Dehmel, 'Die stille Stadt', and the erotically charged 'Laue Sommernacht'. Alma's setting of Rilke's secretive 'Bei dir ist es traut' perfectly catches the poem's hushed, shimmering expectancy. But perhaps the finest of these songs is 'Erntelied', a soaring paean to the day's splendour that culminates in a rapt *vocalise*.

Although **Alexander von Zemlinsky's** earlier works enjoyed a vogue in pre-First World War Vienna, by the 1920s his music was considered too progressive for the traditionalists, and too conservative for the adherents of Schoenberg, his brother-in-law and former pupil. Zemlinsky never quite followed Schoenberg into the brave new world of atonality, writing that 'A great artist, who possesses everything necessary to express essentials, must respect the boundaries of beauty, even if he extends them...' He once remarked, wryly, 'My time will come after my death.' True enough: only in recent decades has Zemlinsky emerged from the giant shadows of Mahler on the one hand and the Schoenberg-led Second Viennese School on the other.

Circa 1898, Zemlinsky set two verses and part of the third from Richard Dehmel's tragic poem on rustic lovers, *Die Magd* ('The maid'), for soprano and string sextet, then for some reason broke off. Yet the two verses he did set, framed and separated by expressive instrumental tone poems, make a self-contained, rounded whole. The string writing, replete with aching suspensions, is succulently chromatic, while the vocal line moves between elegiac lyricism and anguished declamation.

'It should not be forgotten that this work, at its first performance in Vienna, was hissed and caused riots and fist fights. But it soon became very successful', remarked **Schoenberg** wryly in his programme note to *Verklärte Nacht* ('Transfigured night'). Schoenberg had composed his tone poem for string sextet in 1899, while on holiday with Zemlinsky and his sister Mathilde, whom he later married. He may have even been prompted by Zemlinsky's Dehmel setting *Maiblumen blühten überall*. After the notorious 1902 première one critic wrote that the music sounded 'as if the score of Tristan had been smeared while the ink was still wet'. Yet for all its intense chromaticism, the harmonic language of *Verklärte Nacht* never goes beyond late Mahler, while its technique of continuous variation derives from Brahms.

It was not only Schoenberg's music that offended conservative-minded listeners. Richard Dehmel (1863-1920), whose verses we sampled in *Maiblumen blühten überall*, was notorious for his radical social and sexual thinking. Although his poem *Verklärte Nacht* might seem sentimental, even kitsch, today, it was daringly progressive for the 1890s. It tells of two lovers walking in a moonlit forest. The woman confesses to the man that she is expecting the child of a man she did not love, believing that motherhood would give her a purpose in life. The man comforts her, telling her that their mutual love will make the other man's child their own. Schoenberg marks this cathartic moment with a change from troubled D minor to glowing D major. In the shimmering coda each of the work's themes recurs, 'modified anew', as Schoenberg put it, 'so as to glorify the miracles of nature that have changed the night of tragedy into a transfigured night'.

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Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

String Quintet in C Op. 29 (1801)

I. Allegro moderato

II. Adagio molto espressivo

III. Scherzo. Allegro

IV. Presto

Alma Mahler (1879-1964)

Die stille Stadt (pub. 1910)

Richard Dehmel

Liegt eine Stadt im Tale,
Ein blasser Tag vergeht.
Es wird nicht lange dauern
mehr,
Bis weder Mond
noch Sterne
Nur Nacht am
Himmel steht.

Von allen Bergen drücken
Nebel auf die Stadt,
Es dringt kein Dach, nicht
Hof noch Haus,
Kein Laut aus ihrem Rauch
heraus,
Kaum Türme noch und
Brücken.

Doch als dem Wanderer
graute,
Da ging ein Lichtlein auf im
Grund
Und durch den Rauch
und Nebel
Begann ein leiser
Lobgesang
Aus Kindermund.

The silent town

A town lies in the valley,
a pale day is fading;
it will not be
long
before neither moon nor
stars
but night alone will deck
the skies.

From every mountain
mists weigh on the town;
no roof, no courtyard, no
house,
no sound can penetrate
the smoke,
scarcely towers and
bridges even.

But as fear seized the
traveller,
a gleam appeared in the
valley;
and through the smoke
and mist
came a faint song of
praise
from a child's lips.

Laue Sommernacht

(pub. 1910)

Otto Julius Bierbaum

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

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

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

Bei dir ist es traut (pub. 1910)

Rainer Maria Rilke

Bei dir ist es traut,
Zage Uhren schlagen
Wie aus weiten Tagen.
Komm mir ein Liebes
sagen –
Aber nur nicht laut!

Ein Tor geht
irgendwo
Draussen im
Blütentreiben,
Der Abend horcht an den
Scheiben.
Lass uns leise bleiben:
Keiner weiss
uns so.

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.

Found one another in the
deep wood
in the night, the starless
night,
and amazed, we
embraced
in the dark night.

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

**I feel at home with
you**

I feel at home with you,
faintly the hours strike
like in the old days.
Come say something
loving to me –
but not too loud!

A gate moves
somewhere
outside in the sea of
flowers,
evening listens at the
window.
Let us stay quiet:
so no-one knows about
us.

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

Erntelied (1915)

Gustav Falke

Der ganze Himmel glüht
In hellen Morgenrosen;
Mit einem letzten, losen
Traum noch im Gemüt,
Trinken meine Augen diesen
Schein.
Wach und wacher, wie
Genesungswein.

Und nun kommt von jenen
Rosenhängeln
Glanz des Tags und Wehn
von seinen Flügeln,
Kommt er selbst. Und alter
Liebe voll,
Dass ich ganz an ihm
genesen soll,
Gram der Nacht und was
sich sonst verlor,
Ruft er mich an seine Brust
empor.
Und die Wälder und die
Felder klingen,
Und die Gärten heben an zu
singen.

Fern und dumpf rauscht das
erwachte
Meer.
Segel seh' ich in die
Sonnenweiten,
Weisse Segel, frischen
Windes, gleiten,
Stille, goldne Wolken
obenher.
Und im Blauen, sind es
Wanderflüge?
Schweig o Seele! Hast du
kein Genüge?
Sieh, ein Königreich hat dir
der Tag verliehn.
Auf! Dein Wirken
preise ihn!

all arranged by Tom Poster for soprano and string sextet

Harvest song

The whole sky glows
in the rosy morning light;
with a last fleeting
dream still in my soul,
my eyes drink in this
radiance.
Ever more awake like
convalescent wine.

And now from those hills
of roses comes
the splendour of day and
the travail of its wings,
he comes himself, full of
old love;
and that I should quite
recover with him
the sorrow of night and all
that was lost,
he summons me to his
breast!
And the forests and the
fields ring
and the gardens begin to
sing.

The awakened sea
murmurs muffled from
afar,
I see sails on the distant
horizon,
white sails of fresh wind
glide by,
silent golden clouds
above,
and are there wanderer's
wings in the blue?
Hush, my soul, have you
not had your fill?
See, a wealthy king has
granted you this day.
Arise! May your works
sing his praise!

Alexander Zemlinsky (1871-1942)

Maiblumen blühten überall for voice and string sextet (c.1898)

Richard Dehmel

Maiblumen
blühten
überall;
Er sah mich an so trüb und
müd.
Im Faulbaum rief
eine Nachtigall:
Die Blüte flieht! die Blüte
flieht!
Von Düften war die Nacht so
warm,
So warm wie Blut, wie unser
Blut;
Und wir so jung und
freudenarm.
Und über uns im Busch das
Lied,
Das schluchzende Lied: die
Glut verglüht!
Und er so treu und
mir so gut.

Lilies-of-the-valley blossomed everywhere

Lilies-of-the-valley
blossomed everywhere;
he gazed at me with such
sad and weary eyes.
In the berry-bearing alder
a nightingale called:
blossoms flee! Blossoms
flee!
The night was so warm
with scents,
as warm as blood, our
blood;
and we so young and
joyless.
And the song above us in
the bush,
the sobbing song:
passion is fading!
And he so true and so
loving to me.

In Knospen schoss der wilde
Mohn,
Es sog die Sonne unsern
Schweiss.
Es wurden rot die Knospen
schon,
Da wurden meine Wangen
weiss.
Ums liebe Brot, ums
teure Brot
Floss doppelt heiss ins Korn
sein Schweiss,
Der wilde Mohn stand
feuerrot;
Es war wohl fressendes Gift
der Schweiss,
Auch seine Wangen
wurden weiss,
Und die Sonne stach im
Korn ihn tot.

Wild poppy buds sprang
up,
the sun sucked our sweat.
The buds were already
turning red –
my cheeks were turning
white.
To earn dear and
cherished bread
his sweat flowed doubly
warm into the corn,
the wild poppy stood red
as fire;
his sweat was corroding
poison,
and his cheeks too turned
white,
and the sun burned him
to death in the corn.

Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951)

Verklärte Nacht Op. 4 (1899)

Translation of 'Die stille Stadt' 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. 'Bei dir ist es traut' by Jean du Monde. All other translations by Richard Stokes.

Interval
