

WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 29 May 2024
7.30pm

Paula Murrihy mezzo-soprano
Malcolm Martineau piano

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Chansons de Bilitis (1897-8)

La flûte de Pan • La chevelure • Le tombeau des naïades

Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)

Les nuits d'été Op. 7 (1840-1)

*Villanelle • Le spectre de la rose • Sur les lagunes •
Absence • Au cimetière • L'île inconnue*

Interval

Herbert Howells (1892-1983)

King David (1919)

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

Linden Lea (1901)

Ina Boyle (1889-1967)

From *Looking Back* (1961-6)

Carrowdore • All Souls' Night

A Mountain Woman Asks for Quiet that her Child May Sleep
(1925)

Sleep Song (1923)

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

From *Cabaret songs* (1937-9)

*Calypso • Tell me the Truth about Love • Johnny Funeral
Blues*

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This programme of two halves begins in 19th Century France and leads us across the Channel to 20th Century England and Ireland... but whilst water divides these countries, their musical ancestry is richly intertwined and full of echoes and resonances across borders.

Claude Debussy's *Chansons de Bilitis* are the result of a poetic friendship. In 1894, the Belgian-born Pierre Louÿs spent time in Algeria with fellow writer André Gide, and was inspired to write a sizeable collection of prose poems. The collection was dedicated to an Algerian woman, Meriem ben Atala, to whom Gide reputedly lost his virginity; and Louÿs claimed that the poems were not in fact his own invention, but works of the ancient Bilitis which he had 'translated from the Greek for the first time'. Debussy set three of Louÿs's texts between 1897-8. The sinuous phrases of 'La flute de Pan' lead us from the melody of the syrinx to the sensual play of our two lovers, with a witty impersonation of croaking frogs in the final verse. 'La chevelure' is saturated with whole-tone scales and reaches a lush, Wagnerian climax. But in the final song, all is frozen: the snow seems to spin in the air before us. Should we be hopeful as the ice is broken in the final verse? Debussy's music seems newly optimistic in these final moments... but we are left to guess at what might happen as the spring bubbles once more to life.

The writings of Théophile Gautier, poet of **Berlioz's** *Les nuits d'été*, are also to be found in the output of both Debussy. Berlioz's selection of texts from Gautier's *La Comédie de la mort* is not, however, so much a narrative cycle as a succession of dramatic scenes, powerfully and vividly rendered by its composer in both its piano and orchestral versions – with a title of Berlioz's own invention. We move from the fresh, excitable spring lover of 'Villanelle' to the magical 'Le spectre de la rose' and the heartbroken protagonist of 'Sur les lagunes'. 'Absence' is a call for a loved one to come back, though the return in 'Au cimetière' is that of one lost and remembered as 'une forme angélique'. The work ends with a journey to 'L'île inconnue', a fantastical voyage of love and whimsy.

In our leap across the water, we come next to two British songs. **Howells's** 'King David', to a poem by his friend Walter de la Mare, introduces us to the 'sorrowful man' who hopes that the song of one

hundred harps – echoing in little canonic passages through the piano – might ease his plight. The cure is delivered in a series of aching beautiful moments in Howells's score: the King rising, the nightingale's unfurling song, and the eventual healing of David's grief. **Vaughan Williams's** 'Linden Lea', composed around 1901 'in one afternoon', is described by its composer as 'A Dorset Folk Song'. It was his first published work and later appeared in numerous arrangements, vocal and orchestral – and no wonder, with its lilting melody, now bold, now melancholy, which threads so memorably across voice and piano staves alike.

From 1923, Vaughan Williams taught the Enniskerry-born composer **Ina Boyle**. Boyle's first compositional successes and awards had come as a result of her vocal writing; and by the time she began lessons with Vaughan Williams, Boyle had also had two orchestral works performed in London. But she returned to song writing again and again – as her friend and fellow composer Elizabeth Maconchy explained, 'Ina's inspiration almost always came from poetry... allowing [the words] to speak more fully through her music.'

Looking Back was composed in the years before her death in 1967. We hear the first two numbers of the set: 'Carrowdore' (a village in County Down), a memory both elegiac and unsettling in the bare lines of its piano introduction; and 'All Souls' Night', which leads us down into the dark shadows of low bass writing, before the touch of the ghostly lover propels us into the aether. 'A Mountain Woman Asks for Quiet that her Child May Sleep' and 'Sleep Song' are both lullabies, the first solemn, the second softly hypnotic.

We close with another collaboration between friends – and a final journey across the ocean. **Benjamin Britten's** *Cabaret Songs* were written in the late 1930s to texts by WH Auden for the singer Hedli Anderson. (By curious coincidence, Anderson later married Louis MacNeice, who is buried in Carrowdore, the village of Ina Boyle's earlier song.) Her unusually wide range allowed Britten to explore a rich variety of styles: some witty, some sorrowful, all virtuosic for both pianist and singer. The last to be written, 'Calypso', was premièred by Peter Pears and Britten on Long Island, New York in December 1941.

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Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Chansons de Bilitis (1897-8)

Pierre Louÿs

Songs of Bilitis

La flûte de Pan

The flute of Pan

Pour le jour des Hyacinthies,
il m'a donné une syrinx
faite de roseaux bien
taillés, unis avec la blanche
cire qui est douce à mes
lèvres comme le miel.

For Hyacinthus day he
gave me a syrinx made
of carefully cut reeds,
bonded with white wax
which tastes sweet to
my lips like honey.

Il m'apprend à jouer, assise
sur ses genoux; mais je
suis un peu tremblante. Il
en joue après moi, si
doucement que je
l'entends à peine.

He teaches me to play, as
I sit on his lap; but I am
a little fearful. He plays
it after me, so gently
that I scarcely
hear him.

Nous n'avons rien à nous
dire, tant nous sommes
près l'un de l'autre; mais
nos chansons veulent se
répondre, et tour à tour
nos bouches s'unissent sur
la flûte.

We have nothing to say,
so close are we one to
another, but our songs
try to answer each
other, and our mouths
join in turn on the
flute.

Il est tard; voici le chant des
grenouilles vertes qui
commence avec la nuit. Ma
mère ne croira jamais que
je suis restée si longtemps
à chercher ma ceinture
perdue.

It is late; here is the song
of the green frogs that
begins with the night.
My mother will never
believe I stayed out so
long to look for my lost
sash.

La chevelure

The tresses of hair

Il m'a dit: 'Cette nuit, j'ai rêvé.
J'avais ta chevelure autour
de mon cou. J'avais tes
cheveux comme un collier
noir autour de ma
nuque et sur ma
poitrine.

He said to me: 'Last night
I dreamed. I had your
tresses around my
neck. I had your hair
like a black necklace all
round my nape and
over my breast.

'Je les caressais, et c'étaient
les miens; et nous étions
liés pour toujours ainsi, par
la même chevelure la
bouche sur la bouche, ainsi
que deux lauriers n'ont
souvent qu'une racine.

I caressed it and it was
mine; and we were
united thus forever by
the same tresses,
mouth on
mouth,
just as two laurels
often share one root.

'Et peu à peu, il m'a semblé,
tant nos membres étaient

And gradually it seemed
to me, so intertwined

confondus, que je devenais
toi-même ou que tu entrais
en moi comme mon
songe.'

were our limbs, that I
was becoming you, or
you were entering into
me like a dream.'

Quand il eut achevé, il mit
doucement ses mains sur
mes épaules, et il me
regarda d'un regard si
tendre, que je baissai les
yeux avec un frisson.

When he had finished, he
gently set his hands on
my shoulders and
gazed at me so
tenderly that I lowered
my eyes with a shiver.

Le tombeau des naïades

The tomb of the Naiads

Le long du bois couvert de
givre, je marchais; mes
cheveux devant ma
bouche se fleurissaient de
petits glaçons, et mes
sandales étaient lourdes
de neige fangeuse et
tassée.

Along the frost-bound
wood I walked; my hair,
across my mouth,
blossomed with tiny
icicles, and my sandals
were heavy with
muddy, packed
snow.

Il me dit: 'Que cherches-tu?'
– 'Je suis la trace du satyre.
Ses petits pas fourchus
alternent des trous dans
un manteau blanc.' Il me
dit: 'Les satyres sont
morts.

He said to me: 'What do
you seek?' 'I follow the
satyr's track. His little
cloven hoof marks
alternate like holes in a
white cloak.' He said to
me: 'The satyrs are
dead.

'Les satyres et les nymphes
aussi. Depuis trente ans il
n'a pas fait un hiver aussi
terrible. La trace que tu
vois est celle d'un bouc.
Mais restons ici,
où est leur
tombeau.'

The satyrs and the
nymphs too. For thirty
years there has not
been so harsh a winter.
The tracks you see are
those of a goat. But let
us stay here, where
their tomb is.'

Et avec le fer de sa houe il
cassa la glace de la source
où jadis riaient les
naïades. Il prenait de
grands morceaux froids,
et les soulevant
vers le ciel pâle,
il regardait
au travers.

And with the iron head of
his hoe he broke the ice
of the spring where the
naiads used to laugh.
He picked up some
huge cold fragments,
and, raising them to the
pale sky, gazed through
them.

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

Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)

Les nuits d'été Op. 7 (1840-1)

Théophile Gautier

Villanelle

Quand viendra la saison
nouvelle,
Quand auront disparu les
froids,
Tous les deux nous irons, ma
belle,
Pour cueillir le muguet au
bois;
Sous nos pieds égrenant
les perles
Que l'on voit au matin
trembler,
Nous irons écouter les
merles
Siffler!

Le printemps est venu, ma
belle;
C'est le mois des amants
béni,
Et l'oiseau, satinant son
aile,
Dit ses vers au rebord
du nid.
Oh! viens donc sur ce banc
de mousse,
Pour parler de nos beaux
amours,
Et dis-moi de ta voix si
douce:
Toujours!

Loin, bien loin, égarant nos
courses,
Faisons fuir le lapin
caché,
Et le daim au miroir des
sources
Admirant son grand bois
penché;
Puis, chez nous, tout
heureux, tout aises,
En panier enlaçant nos
doigts,
Revenons rapportant des
fraises
Des bois!

Villanelle

When the new season
comes,
when the cold has
gone,
we two will go, my
sweet,
to gather lilies-of-the-
valley in the woods;
scattering as we tread the
pearls of dew
we see quivering each
morn,
we'll go and hear the
blackbirds
sing!

Spring has come, my
sweet;
it is the season lovers
bless,
and the birds, preening
their wings,
sing songs from the edge
of their nests.
Ah! Come, then, to this
mossy bank
to talk of our beautiful
love,
and tell me in your gentle
voice:
forever!

Far, far away we'll stray
from our path,
startling the rabbit from
his hiding-place
and the deer reflected in
the spring,
admiring his great
lowered antlers;
then home we'll go,
serene and at ease,
and entwining our fingers
basket-like,
we'll bring back home
wild
strawberries!

Le spectre de la rose

Soulève ta paupière close
Qu'effleure un songe virginal;

Je suis le spectre d'une rose
Que tu portais hier au
bal.
Tu me pris encore
emperlée
Des pleurs d'argent de
l'arrosoir,
Et parmi la fête
étoilée
Tu me promenas tout
le soir.

O toi qui de ma mort fus
cause,
Sans que tu puisses le
chasser,
Toutes les nuits mon
spectre rose
A ton chevet viendra
danser.
Mais ne crains rien, je ne
réclame
Ni messe ni De
profundis;
Ce léger parfum est mon
âme,
Et j'arrive du
paradis.

Mon destin fut digne
d'envie:
Et pour avoir un sort si
beau,
Plus d'un aurait donné sa
vie,
Car sur ton sein j'ai mon
tombeau,
Et sur l'albâtre où
je repose
Un poète avec un baiser
Ecrivit: Ci-gît une
rose
Que tous les rois vont
jalouser.

Sur les lagunes

Ma belle amie est morte:
Je pleurerai toujours;
Sous la tombe elle
emporte
Mon âme et mes amours.

The spectre of the rose

Open your eyelids,
brushed by a virginal
dream;

I am the spectre of a rose
that yesterday you wore
at the dance.
You plucked me still
sprinkled
with silver tears of
dew,
and amid the glittering
feast
you wore me all evening
long.

O you who brought about
my death,
you shall be powerless to
banish me:
the rosy spectre which
every night
will come to dance at
your bedside.
But be not afraid – I
demand
neither Mass nor De
Profundis;
this faint perfume is my
soul,
and I come from
Paradise.

My destiny was worthy of
envy;
and for such a beautiful
fate,
many would have given
their lives –
for my tomb is on your
breast,
and on the alabaster
where I lie,
a poet with a kiss
has written: Here lies a
rose
which every king will
envy.

On the lagoons

My dearest love is dead:
I shall weep for evermore;
to the tomb she takes
with her
my soul and all my love.

Dans le ciel, sans m'attendre, Elle s'en retourna; L'ange qui l'emmena Ne voulut pas me prendre. Que mon sort est amer! Ah! sans amour, s'en aller sur la mer!	Without waiting for me she has returned to Heaven; the angel who took her away did not wish to take me. How bitter is my fate! Alas! to set sail loveless across the sea!
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La blanche créature Est couchée au cercueil. Comme dans la nature Tout me paraît en deuil! La colombe oubliée Pleure et songe à l'absent; Mon âme pleure et sent Qu'elle est dépareillée. Que mon sort est amer! Ah! sans amour, s'en aller sur la mer!	The pure white being lies in her coffin. How everything in nature seems to mourn! The forsaken dove weeps, dreaming of its absent mate; my soul weeps and feels itself adrift. How bitter is my fate! Alas! to set sail loveless across the sea!
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Sur moi la nuit immense S'étend comme un linceul; Je chante ma romance Que le ciel entend seul. Ah! Comme elle était belle, Et comme je l'aimais! Je n'aimerai jamais Une femme autant qu'elle. Que mon sort est amer! Ah! sans amour, s'en aller sur la mer!	The immense night above me is spread like a shroud; I sing my song which heaven alone can hear. Ah! how beautiful she was, and how I loved her! I shall never love a woman as I loved her. How bitter is my fate! Alas! to set sail loveless across the sea!
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Absence

Reviens, reviens, ma bien-aimée; Comme une fleur loin du soleil, La fleur de ma vie est fermée Loin de ton sourire vermeil!	Return, return, my sweetest love! Like a flower far from the sun, the flower of my life is closed far from your crimson smile!
--	---

Entre nos coeurs quelle distance! Tant d'espace entre nos baisers! O sort amer! O dure absence! O grands désirs inapaisés!	Such a distance between our hearts! So great a gulf between our kisses! O bitter fate! O harsh absence! O great unassuaged desires!
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Reviens, reviens, ma bien-aimée! Comme une fleur loin du soleil, La fleur de ma vie est fermée Loin de ton sourire vermeil!	Return, return, my sweetest love! Like a flower far from the sun, the flower of my life is closed far from your crimson smile!
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D'ici là-bas, que de campagnes, Que de villes et de hameaux, Que de vallons et de montagnes, A lasser le pied des chevaux!	So many intervening plains, so many towns and hamlets, so many valleys and mountains to weary the horses' hooves!
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Reviens, reviens, ma bien-aimée! Comme une fleur loin du soleil, La fleur de ma vie est fermée Loin de ton sourire vermeil!	Return, return, my sweetest love! Like a flower far from the sun, the flower of my life is closed far from your crimson smile!
--	---

Au cimetière

Connaissez-vous la blanche
tombe
Où flotte avec un son
plaintif
L'ombre d'un if?
Sur l'if, une pâle colombe,
Triste et seule, au soleil
couchant,
Chante son chant;

Un air maladivement
tendre,
A la fois charmant et
fatal,
Qui vous fait mal
Et qu'on voudrait toujours
entendre,
Un air, comme en soupire
aux cieus
L'ange amoureux.

At the cemetery

Do you know the white
tomb,
where the shadow of a
yew
waves plaintively?
On that yew a pale dove,
sad and solitary at
sundown
sings its song;

A melody of morbid
sweetness,
delightful and deathly at
once,
which wounds you
and which you'd like to
hear forever,
a melody, such as in the
heavens,
a lovesick angel sighs.

Song continues overleaf. Please turn the page as quietly as possible.

On dirait que l'âme éveillée Pleure sous terre à l'unisson De la chanson, Et du malheur d'être oubliée Se plaint dans un roucoulement Bien doucement.	As if the awakened soul weeps beneath the earth together with the song, and at the sorrow of being forgotten murmurs its complaint most meltingly.
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Sur les ailes de la musique On sent lentement revenir Un souvenir; Une ombre, une forme angélique Passe dans un rayon tremblant, En voile blanc.	On the wings of music you sense the slow return of a memory; a shadow, an angelic form passes in a shimmering beam, veiled in white.
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Les belles-de-nuit, demi- closes, Jettent leur parfum faible et doux Autour de vous, Et le fantôme aux molles poses Murmure, en vous tendant les bras: Tu reviendras?	The Marvels of Peru, half- closed, shed their fragrance sweet and faint about you, and the phantom with its languid gestures murmurs, reaching out to you: will you return?
--	--

Oh! jamais plus, près de la tombe Je n'irai, quand descend le soir Au manteau noir, Ecouter la pâle colombe Chanter sur la pointe de l'if Son chant plaintif!	Ah! nevermore shall I approach that tomb, when evening descends in its black cloak, to listen to the pale dove from the top of a yew sing its plaintive song!
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L'île inconnue

The unknown isle

Dites, la jeune belle, Où voulez-vous aller? La voile ouvre son aile, La brise va souffler!	Tell me, pretty young maid, where is it you would go? The sail is billowing, the breeze about to blow!
---	--

L'aviron est d'ivoire, Le pavillon de moire, Le gouvernail d'or fin; J'ai pour lest une orange, Pour voile une aile d'ange, Pour mousse un séraphin.	The oar is of ivory, the pennant of watered silk, the rudder of finest gold; for ballast I've an orange, for sail an angel's wing, for cabin boy a seraph.
--	--

Dites, la jeune belle, Où voulez-vous aller? La voile ouvre son aile,	Tell me, pretty young maid, where is it you would go? The sail is billowing,
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La brise va souffler!	the breeze about to blow!
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Est-ce dans la Baltique, Dans la mer Pacifique, Dans l'île de Java? Ou bien est-ce en Norvège, Cueillir la fleur de neige Ou la fleur d'Angsoka?	Perhaps the Baltic, or the Pacific or the Isle of Java? Or else to Norway, to pluck the snow flower or the flower of Angsoka?
---	--

Dites, la jeune belle, Où voulez-vous aller?	Tell me, pretty young maid, where is it you would go?
--	---

Menez-moi, dit la belle, A la rive fidèle Où l'on aime toujours. – Cette rive, ma chère, On ne la connaît guère Au pays des amours.	Take me, said the pretty maid, to the shore of faithfulness where love endures forever. – That shore, my sweet, is scarce known, in the realm of love.
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Où voulez-vous aller? La brise va souffler.	Where do you wish to go? The breeze is about to blow!
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Interval

Herbert Howells (1892-1983)

King David (1919)

Walter de la Mare

King David was a sorrowful man:
No cause for his sorrow had he ...

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Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

Linden Lea (1901)

William Barnes

Within the woodlands, flow'ry gladed,
By the oak trees' mossy moot,
The shining grass blades, timber-shaded,

Now do quiver underfoot;
And birds do whistle overhead,
And water's bubbling in its bed;
And there, for me, the apple tree
Do lean down low in Linden Lea.

When leaves, that lately were a-springing,
Now do fade within the copse,
And painted birds do hush their singing,
Up upon the timber tops;
And brown-leaved fruit's a-turning red,
In cloudless sunshine overhead,
With fruit for me, the apple tree
Do lean down low in Linden Lea.

Let other folk make money faster
In the air of dark-room'd towns;
I don't dread a peevish master,
Though no man may heed my frowns.
I be free to go abroad,
Or take again my homeward road
To where, for me, the apple tree
Do lean down low in Linden Lea.

Ina Boyle (1889-1967)

From *Looking Back* (1961-6)

Carrowdore

John Irvine

It was a night of wind and stars,
And all the land was sweet with May
When we set out for Carrowdore
And lingered on the starlit way.

I have forgotten much since then
Of things that only youth can know,
Yet I remember how we went
To Carrowdore long years ago.

All Souls' Night

Frances Cornford

My love came back to me,
Under the November tree,
Shelterless and dim.
He put his hand upon my shoulder.
He did not think me strange or older,
Nor I, him.

A Mountain Woman Asks for Quiet that her Child May Sleep (1925)

Patrick Pearse, trans. Thomas MacDonagh

Be quiet, O house! and O little grey mice,
Stay at home tonight in your hidden lairs!
O moths on the window, fold your wings!
Cease your droning, O little black chafers!
O plover and O curlew, over my house do not travel!
Speak not, O barnacle goose, going over the
mountain here!

O creatures of the mountain, that wake so early,
Stir not tonight till the sun whitens over you.

Sleep Song (1923)

after Patrick Pearse

Deirín dé, Deirín dé!

The brown bittern speaks in the bog;

Deirín dé, Deirín dé!

The nightjar is abroad on the heath.

Deirín dé, Deirín dé!

Kine will go west at dawn of day;

Deirín dé, Deirín dé!

And my child will go to the pasture to mind them.

Deirín dé, Deirín dé!

Moon will rise, and sun will set;

Deirín dé, Deirín dé!

Kine will come east at end of day.

Deirín dé, Deirín dé!

I will let my child go gatherine blackberries,

Deirín dé, Deirín dé!

If he sleep softly till the ring of day!

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Cabaret songs (1937-9)

WH Auden

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

Calypso

Driver, drive faster and make a good run
Down the Springfield Line under the shining sun...

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

Tell me the Truth about Love

Liebe... l'amour... amor... amoris...

Some say that love's a little boy, and some say it's a
bird...

Johnny

O the valley in the summer when I and my John
Beside the deep river walk on and on ...

Funeral Blues

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone ...

*Translations of Debussy and Berlioz by Richard Stokes from A French
Song Companion (Johnson/Stokes) published by OUP.*