

WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 29 September 2021 7.30pm

Christian Gerhaher baritone

Isabelle Faust violin

Anne Katharina Schreiber violin

Timothy Ridout viola

Danusha Waskiewicz viola

Jean-Guihen Queyras cello

Christian Poltéra cello



In partnership with and supported by the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in London

Othmar Schoeck (1886-1957)

Notturmo Op. 47 (1931-3)

I. Ruhig • II. Presto • III. Unruhig bewegt • IV. Ruhig und leise • V. Rasch und kräftig

Interval

Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951)

Verklärte Nacht Op. 4 (1899)

Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)

Les nuits d'été Op. 7 (1840-1) *arranged by David Matthews*

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

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Born in Brunnen, on the shore of Lake Lucerne, **Othmar Schoeck** studied with Max Reger in Leipzig before settling in Zurich, where he developed a highly individual musical language often marked by extreme chromaticism. The *Notturmo* was composed in 1931–3 and first performed in Zurich on 18 May 1933 by the baritone Felix Loeffel and the Zurich String Quartet. It was published by Universal Edition and warmly received in several European cities: one early admirer was Alban Berg, who heard it in Vienna in 1935.

Subtitled 'five movements for string quartet and a voice', the *Notturmo* sets 10 poems (nine by Nikolaus Lenau and one by Gottfried Keller). Four are heard in the first movement; the second, third and fourth movements set one each; and the finale sets the last three. The mood is predominantly dark and sometimes desolate, nowhere more so than in the first movement which concerns marital strife – a reflection of Schoeck's own emotional turmoil at the time, partly a result his own serial infidelity with the pianist Mary de Senger. At the heart of the first movement is a long instrumental interlude beginning with a theme that Schoeck's biographer, Chris Walton, has identified as the 'Mary' [de Senger] theme. The second movement is a ghostly *Scherzo*, the strings muted throughout, while the third is a highly chromatic *Rondo*, marked 'restless'. The fourth movement is a bleak evocation of autumn, while in the final movement, the 'Mary' theme returns, transformed. At the close it seems to dissolve into thin air as the music finds repose, fading to near silence on a C major chord.

The string sextet *Verklärte Nacht* ('Transfigured Night') was composed between September and December 1899. It is one of **Schoenberg's** earliest major works and its musical language owes much to both Wagner and Brahms. The score uses leitmotifs and was clearly inspired by the sound world of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, but in terms of formal design, the main influence was Brahms. Themes are subjected to variation, or combined with others, or fragmented and dissolved – a process that Schoenberg described in Brahms's music as 'developing variation'. This heady combination of Wagnerian musical narrative and Brahmsian formal control enabled Schoenberg to create a grandly conceived single movement in which his distinctive early style emerges with magnificent assurance.

The work is programmatic, taking its title from a poem by Richard Dehmel (1863–1920). When Dehmel's *Weib und Welt* (which includes 'Verklärte Nacht') was published in 1896 it caused a scandal and Dehmel was tried for obscenity and blasphemy. Though he was

acquitted, the court demanded that all copies of the book should be burned, but Schoenberg evidently managed to hang on to his copy. In Dehmel's 'Verklärte Nacht', a man and a woman pass through a moonlit landscape. She confesses to carrying a child that is not his; bathed in light, he tells her that she must have the child, and it will be their own. At the end of the poem, 'he clasps her around her strong hips. Their kisses mingle in the night air.' This text not only inspired Schoenberg but also had an impact on the form of *Verklärte Nacht*, a kind of tone poem for string sextet. The first performance took place on 18 March 1902 in the Vienna Musikverein when it was played by the Rosé Quartet with Franz Jelinek and Franz Schmidt (a fine cellist as well as an important composer). *Verklärte Nacht* became one of Schoenberg's most successful works and he subsequently arranged it for string orchestra, but it is the original sextet version in which the intimacy and intensity of the music comes over most powerfully.

Berlioz composed *Les nuits d'été* in 1840 as a set of six songs for voice and piano which he later orchestrated. The version heard in tonight's programme is an arrangement for chamber forces by **David Matthews**. The poems are all by Berlioz's friend Théophile Gautier (1811–72), though the title of the set was invented by Berlioz himself. While the songs were not intended as a thematically integrated cycle (in the manner of Schumann's *Dichterliebe*) they are linked by a common theme of love, loss and longing. 'Villanelle' was the first to be composed, in March 1840, and the others followed over the next few months. After the celebration of springtime love in 'Villanelle', 'Le spectre de la rose' takes a darker turn as the ghost of a dead rose addresses a young woman. 'Sur les lagunes' is a lament by a sailor for his dead wife, reaching a climax as he declares that he will never be able to love another woman. 'Absence' is a plea for the beloved to return, marked by an expressive refrain, 'Reviens, reviens ma bien-aimée!'. The mood of the set is at its most solemn in 'Au cimetière', but there is a return to the optimism of the 'Villanelle' for the final song, 'L'île inconnue', evoking an imaginary island where love is eternal. Berlioz's music reflects this, and the title Gautier's originally gave his poem: 'Barcarolle'.

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Othmar Schoeck (1886-1957)

Notturmo Op. 47 (1931-3)

Nikolaus Lenau and Gottfried Keller

I. Ruhig

a.
Sieh dort den Berg mit seinem
Wiesenhänge,
Die Sonne hat verzehrend ihn
durchglüht.
Und Strahl auf Strahl noch immer
niedersprüht;
Wie sehnt er nach der Wolke sich so
bange!

Dort schwebt sie schon in ihrem
luftgen Gange,
Auf deren Kuss die Blumenfreude
blüht;
Wie flehend sich um ihre Neigung
müht
Der Berg, dass sie sein Felsenarm
umfange!

Sie kommt, sie naht, sie wird
herniedersinken,
Er aber die Erquickungsreiche
tief
Hinab in seinen heissen Busen
trinken.

Und auferblühen in wonniger
Beseelung
Wird, was an schönen Blüten in ihm
schlief,
Ein treues Bild der Liebe, der
Vermählung!

b.
Sieh hier den Bach, anbei die
Waldesrose:
Sie mögen dir vom Lieben und
Vermählen
Die wandelbaren, täuschungsvollen
Lose
Getreuer viel, als Berg und Wolk',
erzählen:

Die Rose lauscht ins liebliche
Getöse,
Umsungen von des Haines süssen
Kehlen,
Und ihr zu Füßen weint der
Ruhelose,
Der immer naht, ihr immer doch zu
fehlen.

Ein schönes Spiel! so lang der
Frühling säumt,

a.
Behold the mountain with its sloping
meadow,
the sun has devoured it with its
glow.
And beam upon beam still streams
down;
how anxiously the mountain longs
for cloud!

The cloud now floats breezily
by,
kisses the flowers, thus heightening
their joy;
how fervently the mountain
desires
the cloud's affection, to kiss it in its
rocky embrace.

Now it comes, draws near, is about
to descend,
but the mountain will drink its rich
refreshment
deep into its scorched
bosom!

And the beautiful blossoms that had
lain dormant
will be blissfully
reawakened –
a faithful image of love and
marriage!

Behold the brook and nearby the
wild rose:
they can tell you of the fickle
deceiving fate
of love and
marriage
more accurately than mountain and
cloud:

The rose hearkens to the charming
cacophony
sung by the sweet voices of the
grove,
and the restless brook weeps at her
feet,
drawing ever nearer but never
reaching her.

A fine game! So long as spring
tarries,

Die Rose hold zum Bach hinunter
träumt,
Solang ihr Bild in seinen Wellen
zittert.

Wenn Sommersgluten sie vom
Strauche jagen,
Wenn sie vom Bache wird
davongetragen,
Dann ist sie welk, der Zauber ist
verwittert!

c.
Andante appassionato

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

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

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

e.
Sahst du ein Glück
vorübergehn,
Das nie sich wiederfindet,
Ist's gut in einem Strom zu sehn,
Wo alles wogt und
schwindet.

O, starre nur hinein, hinein,
Du wirst es leichter missen,
Was dir, und soll's dein Liebstes sein,
Vom Herzen ward gerissen.

Blick' unverwandt hinab zum Fluss,
Bis deine Tränen fallen,
Und sieh durch ihren warmen Guss
Die Flut hinunterwallen.

Hinträumend wird Vergessenheit
Des Herzens Wunde schliessen;
Die Seele sieht mit ihrem Leid,
Sich selbst vorüberfliessen.

II. Presto

a.
Presto

and the gracious rose dreams of the
brook below,
so long will its *reflection* ripple in its
waves.

When summer's heat drives the
rose from the bush,
when it is borne away by the
brook –
then it withers, then does its magic
vanish!

c.
Andante appassionato

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

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

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

e.
If you witnessed your happiness
dissolve,
never to reappear,
it's good to gaze into a river,
where everything sways and
vanishes.

O stare, stare into its depths,
then you will miss less
what you loved most,
when it was ripped from your heart.

Stare into the river with fixed gaze
until your tears fall,
and watch through their warm torrent
the flood flow underneath.

Dreaming, oblivion
will close the heart's wound;
the soul with its sorrow
will see itself float by.

<p><i>b.</i> Der Traum war so wild, der Traum war so schaurig, So tief erschütternd, unendlich traurig, Ich möchte gerne mir sagen: Dass ich ja fest geschlafen hab', Dass ich ja nicht geträumet hab', Doch rinnen mir noch die Tränen herab, Ich höre mein Herz noch schlagen.</p> <p>Ich bin erwacht in banger Ermattung, Ich finde mein Tuch durchnässt am Kissen, Wie man's heim bringt von einer Bestattung; Hab ich's im Traume hervorgerissen Und mir getrocknet das Gesicht? Ich weiss es nicht. Doch waren sie da, die schlimmen Gäste, Sie waren da zum nächtlichen Feste. Ich schlief, mein Haus war preisgegeben. Sie führten darin ein wüstes Leben. Nun sind sie fort, die wilden Naturen; In diesen Tränen find' ich die Spuren, Wie sie mir alles zusammen gerüttet, Und über den Tisch den Wein geschüttet.</p>	<p><i>b.</i> The dream was so wild, the dream was so chilling, so deeply distressing, endlessly sad, I should like to tell myself that I slept soundly, that I did not dream, but tears still run down my cheeks, I still hear my heart pounding.</p> <p>I woke in anxious exhaustion, I find my handkerchief drenched on the pillow, like one brought back from a funeral; did I pull it out in my dream and wipe my face with it? I do not know. Yet they were there, the grim ghosts, they had come for the nocturnal feast. I slept, my house was invaded. Inside, they led a dissolute life. Now they are gone, the wild demons; in these tears I find traces of how they wrecked everything and spilled wine over the table.</p>
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III. Unruhig bewegt

<p><i>a.</i> Es weht der Wind so kühl, entlaubend rings die Äste, Er ruft zum Wald hinein: Gut' Nacht, ihr Erdengäste!</p> <p>Am Hügel strahlt der Mond, die grauen Wolken jagen Schnell übers Tal hinaus, wo alle Wälder klagen.</p> <p>Das Bächlein schleicht hinab, von abgestorb'nen Hainen Trägt es die Blätter fort mit halbersticktem Weinen.</p> <p>Nie hört' ich einen Quell so leise traurig klingend, Die Weid' am Ufer steht, die weichen Äste ringend.</p> <p>Und eines toten Friends gedenkend, lausch' ich nieder Zum Quell, der murmelt stets: Wir sehen uns nicht wieder!</p>	<p><i>a.</i> The wind blows so chill, stripping the boughs all around, it calls to the forest: good night, you mortal guests!</p> <p>The moon shines on the hill, grey clouds scud swiftly out into the valley, where all the forests moan.</p> <p>The brooklet meanders down, bearing the leaves away from withered groves with half- choked weeping.</p> <p>I never heard a brook murmur so softly and sadly, the willow on its bank bends its gentle boughs.</p> <p>And thinking of a dead friend, I hearken to the waters which murmur on and on: we shall not meet again!</p>
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<p>Horch! plötzlich in der Luft ein schnatterndes Geplauder: Wildgänse auf der Flucht vor winterlichem Schauder.</p> <p>Sie jagen hinter sich den Herbst mit raschen Flügeln, Sie lassen scheu zurück das Sterben auf den Hügeln.</p> <p>Wo sind sie? ha! wie schnell sie dort vorüberstreichen Am hellen Mond, und jetzt unsichtbar schon entweichen!</p> <p>Ihr ahnungsvoller Laut lässt sich noch immer hören, Dem Wanderer in der Brust die Wehmut aufzustören.</p> <p>Südwärts die Vögel ziehn mit eiligem Geschwätze; Doch auch den Süden deckt der Tod mit seinem Netze.</p> <p>Natur das Ew'ge schaut in unruhvollen Träumen, Fährt auf und will entfliehn den todverfall'nen Räumen.</p> <p>Der abgerissne Ruf, womit Zugvögel schweben, Ist Aufschrei wilden Traums von einem ew'gen Leben.</p> <p>Ich höre sie nicht mehr, schon sind sie weit von hinnen; Die Zweifel in der Brust den Nachtgesang beginnen:</p> <p>Ist's Erdenleben Schein? Ist es die umgekehrte Fata Morgana nur, des Ew'gen Spiegelfährte?</p> <p>Warum denn aber wird dem Erdenleben bange, Wenn es ein Schein nur ist, vor seinem Untergange?</p> <p>Ist solche Bängnis nur von dem, was wird bestehen, Ein Wiederglanz, dass auch sein Bild nicht will vergehen?</p> <p>Dies Bangen auch nur Schein? So schwärmen die Gedanken, Wie dort durchs öde Tal die Herbstesnebel schwanken.</p>	<p>Listen – a sudden cackling chatter in the air: wild geese escaping winter's horror.</p> <p>On swift wings they drive autumn away, timidly, they leave behind the decaying hills.</p> <p>Where are they? Ha! how swiftly they flit by across the bright moon, and now vanish from sight!</p> <p>Their foreboding cries can still be heard, awakening sadness in the wanderer's breast.</p> <p>The birds fly south with rapid chatter; but death ensnares the south too in its toils.</p> <p>Nature gazes on the eternal with restless dreams, starts up and tries to flee the death- marked spaces.</p> <p>The harsh cries of the migrant birds resemble the shriek of a wild dream of eternal life.</p> <p>I no longer hear them, they are already far away; the doubts in your breast intone their night song:</p> <p>Is mortal life an illusion? Is it merely the reflected fata morgana, eternity's playfellow?</p> <p>Why then does mortal life grow fearful of its downfall, if it is mere illusion?</p> <p>Is such fear merely a reflection of what will remain, of his image that will not vanish?</p> <p>Is this fear too mere illusion? Thus thoughts teem, just like autumn mists that whirl through the desolate valley.</p>
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IV. Ruhig und leise

<i>a.</i> Rings ein Verstummen, ein Entfärben: Wie sanft den Wald die Lüfte streicheln, Sein welkes Laub ihm abzuschmeicheln; Ich liebe dieses milde Sterben.	<i>a.</i> Silence falls all around, colours fade, how softly the breezes brush the wood to coax from it the withered leaves; I love this gentle dying.
Von hinnen geht die stille Reise, Die Zeit der Liebe ist verklungen, Die Vögel haben ausgesungen, Und dürre Blätter sinken leise.	The silent journey ends, the time of love is past, the birds now sing no more, and softly the dry leaves fall.
Die Vögel zogen nach dem Süden, Aus dem Verfall des Laubes tauchen Die Nester, die nicht Schutz mehr brauchen, Die Blätter fallen stets, die müden.	The birds have flown south, nests from decaying leaves emerge, that no longer need protection, the leaves keep falling, the weary leaves.
In dieses Waldes leisem Rauschen Ist mir als hör' ich Kunde wehen, Dass alles Sterben und Vergehen Nur heimlich still vergnügtes Tauschen.	In the soft murmur of this wood I seem to hear a message waft my way: that all dying and fading is secretly just a happy exchange.

V. Rasch und kräftig

<i>a.</i> „Ach, wer möchte einsam trinken, Ohne Rede, Rundgesang, Ohne an die Brust zu sinken Einem Freund im Wonnedrang?“	<i>a.</i> Ah, who would drink alone without speech or singing rounds, without, at the height of rapture, sinking into a friend's embrace?
Ich; die Freunde sind zu selten; Ohne Denken trinkt das Tier, Und ich lad' aus andern Welten Lieber meine Gäste mir.	I would; friends are too scarce; an animal drinks without thinking, and I prefer to invite my guests from other worlds.
Wenn im Wein Gedanken quellen, Wühlt ihr mir den Schlamm empor, Wie des Ganges heil'ge Wellen Trübt ein Elephantenchor.	When thoughts arise from wine, they only stir up silt, just as herds of trumpeting elephants muffle the sound of the Ganges' waves.
Dionys in Vaterarme Mild den einzlen Mann empfing, Der, gekränket von dem Schwarme, Nach Eleusis opfern ging.	Dionysus in his father's arms gently received the lone man, who, hurt by the herd, went to Eleusis to offer sacrifice.
<i>b.</i> <i>Allegretto</i>	<i>b.</i> <i>Allegretto</i>
<i>c.</i> O Einsamkeit, wie trink ich gerne Aus deiner frischen Waldzisterne!	<i>c.</i> O solitude, how I love to drink from your fresh forest well.

<i>d.</i> <i>Allegretto tranquillo</i>	<i>d.</i> <i>Allegretto tranquillo</i>
<i>e.</i> Heerwagen, mächtig Sternbild der Germanen, Das du fährst mit stetig stillem Zuge Über den Himmel deine herrliche Bahn! Von Osten aufgestiegen alle Nacht! O fahre hin und kehre täglich wieder! Sieh meinen Gleichmut und mein treues Auge, Das dir folgt so lange Jahre! Und bin ich müde, o so nimm die Seele, Die so leicht an Wert, doch auch an üblem Willen, Nimm sie auf und lass sie mit dir reisen, Schuldlos wie ein Kind, das deine Strahlendeichsel Nicht beschwert, hinüber! Ich spähe weit, wohin wir fahren.	<i>e.</i> Big Dipper, mighty constellation of the Teutons, you steer your glorious path persistently and silently across the heavens, climbing nightly from the East! O speed thither and return again each day! Observe my equanimity and my loyal eyes that have followed you for so many years! And I am weary – so take my soul which has so little worth and so little ill-will, take it aloft and let it travel with you, innocent as a child who will be no burden to your gleaming shafts! I'll watch out far ahead to see where we are bound.

Interval

Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951)

Verklärte Nacht Op. 4 (1899)

Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)

Les nuits d'été Op. 7 (1840-1)

arranged by David Matthews

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.

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.

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!

Le spectre de la rose

Soulève ta paupière close
Qu'éffleure 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.
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!

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!

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.
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!

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!

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!

Absence

Reviens, reviens, ma bien-aimée;
Comme une fleur loin du soleil,
La fleur de ma vie est fermée
Loin de ton sourire vermeil!

Entre nos cœurs quelle distance!
Tant d'espace entre nos baisers!
O sort amer! O dure absence!
O grands désirs inapaisés!

Reviens, reviens, ma bien-aimée!
Comme une fleur loin du soleil,
La fleur de ma vie est fermée
Loin de ton sourire vermeil!

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!

Reviens, reviens, ma bien-aimée!
Comme une fleur loin du soleil,
La fleur de ma vie est fermée
Loin de ton sourire vermeil!

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;

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!

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!

Absence

Return, return, my sweetest love!
Like a flower far from the sun,
the flower of my life is closed
far from your crimson smile!

Such a distance between our hearts!
So great a gulf between our kisses!
O bitter fate! O harsh absence!
O great unassuaged desires!

Return, return, my sweetest love!
Like a flower far from the sun,
the flower of my life is closed
far from your crimson smile!

So many intervening plains,
so many towns and hamlets,
so many valleys and mountains
to weary the horses' hooves!

Return, return, my sweetest love!
Like a flower far from the sun,
the flower of my life is closed
far from your crimson smile!

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;

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.

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.

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.

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.

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!

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,
La brise va souffler!

Tell me, pretty young maid,
where is it you would go?
The sail is billowing,
the breeze about to blow!

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.

Où voulez-vous aller?
La brise va souffler.

Where do you wish to go?
The breeze is about to blow!

Translation of Notturmo by Richard Stokes. Translation of Les nuits d'été by Richard Stokes from A French Song Companion (Johnson/Stokes) published by OUP.