

WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 2 May 2023
7.30pm

Supported by the Rick Mather David Scrase Foundation

Mark Padmore tenor

Elias String Quartet

Sara Bitlloch violin

Donald Grant violin

Simone van der Giessen viola

Marie Bitlloch cello

Pavel Kolesnikov piano

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

String Quartet in G Op. 33 No. 5 (1781)

I. Vivace assai • II. Largo e cantabile •

III. Scherzo - Trio • IV. Finale. Allegretto

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

La bonne chanson Op. 61 (1892-4)

Une sainte en son auréole • Puisque l'aube grandit •

*La lune blanche luit dans les bois • J'allais par des
chemins perfides • J'ai presque peur, en vérité •*

*Avant que tu ne t'en ailles • Donc, ce sera par un clair
jour d'été • N'est-ce pas? • L'hiver a cessé*

Interval

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

3 Poems by Walt Whitman (?1925)

Nocturne • A Clear Midnight • Joy, Shipmate, Joy!

On Wenlock Edge (1908-9)

On Wenlock Edge • From far, from eve and morning •

Is my team ploughing? • Oh, when I was in love with you

• Bredon Hill • Clun



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For a significant part of his life, **Haydn** worked in service for the Esterházy family. The composer wrote symphonies and stage works for their entertainment, but rarely provided chamber music, as the princes cared little for it. String quartets were therefore the preserve of Haydn's life away from court, encouraged by the advent of music publishing in nearby Vienna, not least the firm Artaria.

The first of Haydn's quartets to be issued by the company were his Op. 33 set of six, nicknamed the 'Russian' due to their dedication to Grand Duke Paul of Russia, whose wife's apartment played host to the première of many (if not all) of the quartets on Christmas Day 1781. Of the six, the G major was probably written first. It is full of witty, lively music, suggestive of *opera buffa*. Certainly, the Quartet's initial gestures strike a conversational note. While the cadential response ends the discussion before it has begun, this is only the springboard to a driven sonata form, with a bustling first subject and a *dolce* second subject, as Haydn deviates from his usual monothematic practice.

The plunge into G minor during the development section looks ahead to the plangent *Largo*, in which the first violin becomes an *opera seria* heroine, complete with ornamentation. The sassiness of the first movement then returns during the final cadence, in turn teeing up the *Scherzo* – a movement that more than lives up to its name. If the *Finale* can, at times, appear a little too blithe, its three variations and coda strike a balance between the Quartet's opposing moods.

Verlaine wrote the 21 poems of *La bonne chanson* in 1870, inspired by Mathilde Mauté de Fleurville, the teenager he was due to marry. It was all something of an abortive attempt to divert Verlaine from a life of gay debauchery and absinthe. While the marriage inevitably failed, with Verlaine running off to find Arthur Rimbaud, the poems remained a source of inspiration, including for **Fauré**, who set nine of the texts between 1892 and 1894.

Unlike Verlaine, who wrote under something of a false pretext, Fauré's eponymous cycle is a work of genuine optimism. Not for nothing was it dedicated to his mistress, Emma Bardac, who was to become the second Mrs Debussy. She gave the work's first private performances, before a public première followed on 20 April 1895, meeting a somewhat mixed response. None other than Proust relished the motivic and harmonic complexity of Fauré's cycle, though the composer's former teacher, the surprisingly conservative Saint-Saëns, favoured his earlier songs. There can be no doubt, however, that, despite differences in contemporary opinion, Fauré was at the peak of his powers.

Arranging Verlaine's poetry into his own narrative sequence, he provided a network of musical ideas. The first motif represents the spirit of the age of Charles

Martel, the 8th-century ruler of Francia, celebrated in the first song. Another kernel cites the beloved in 'La lune blanche', itself recalling Fauré's earlier 'Lydia'. A declaration of love in the fifth song, two singing quails in the sixth and, finally, the power of nature in 'Avant que tu ne t'en ailles' complete the motivic set. Woven into the texture, all these are then presented in the final song, which Fauré completed in February 1894.

Just like Fauré's love of Verlaine's work, Walt Whitman's poetry was a constant inspiration for **Vaughan Williams**. His poems first featured in *A Sea Symphony* (1903-9), before inspiring *Toward the Unknown Region* in 1904 and the *3 Nocturnes* of 1908, as well as *Darest thou now, o Soul* in 1925. Likely in the same year, the composer set three other Whitman texts to music: 'Nocturne', which had already featured as the middle movement in the 1908 work; 'A Clear Midnight', featuring one of Whitman's most searing poems, captured here with hymnic intensity; and the ebullient, brackish 'Joy, Shipmate, Joy!'.

On Wenlock Edge is an earlier but, arguably, even more important milestone in Vaughan Williams's output. The work began with a setting of 'Is my team ploughing?' for voice and piano, at some point in late 1908 or early 1909. The composer then returned to AE Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* the following summer, adding five further songs, with piano and string quartet. The cycle is the result of several points of influence. Folksong was, of course, a constant presence, with Vaughan Williams's interest in material from the Welsh Marches bringing him into direct contact with Housman's landscape – the 'Shropshire' of the poems stretches both west into Wales and east to the Worcestershire border with the composer's native Gloucestershire. Yet, for all these local concerns, Vaughan Williams had also recently been studying with Fauré's pupil Ravel, with the bells of 'Bredon Hill' echoing *La vallée des cloches* from *Miroirs*. *On Wenlock Edge* is nonetheless its own thing: a dramatic cantata, later orchestrated, it would provide a benchmark for other 20th-century English cycles, including those by Finzi, Britten and Tippett.

After the hurly-burly of the titular song, 'From far, from eve and morning' offers a calmer vision of the borderlands. The poet's breath-taking 'Is my team ploughing?', the spur to the whole cycle, is set with aching sincerity, even if Housman was irritated by Vaughan Williams cutting two verses. Its differentiation of voices, the furtive responses and the survivor's impassioned confessions are all captured with operatic intensity. 'Oh, when I was in love with you' is then thrown away, a mere trinket between the ploughman's drama and 'Bredon Hill', which shimmers in a summer haze. Another theatrical *scena*, it tells of tenderness and tragedy, before 'Clun' looks beyond the pain of Housman's world to something more eternal.

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Joseph Haydn

(1732-1809)

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La bonne chanson Op. 61 (1892-4)

Paul Verlaine

Une sainte en son auréole

Une Sainte en son auréole,
Une Châtelaine en sa tour,
Tout ce que contient la
parole
Humaine de grâce et d'amour;

La note d'or que fait entendre
Un cor dans le lointain des bois,
Mariée à la fierté
tendre
Des nobles Dames
d'autrefois;

Avec cela le charme insigne
D'un frais sourire triomphant
Éclos dans des candeurs de
cygne
Et des rougeurs de femme-
enfant;

Des aspects nacrés, blancs
et roses,
Un doux accord patricien:
Je vois, j'entends toutes ces
choses
Dans son nom Carlovingien.

A Saint in her halo

A Saint in her halo,
a Châtelaine in her tower,
all that human words
contain
of grace and love;

The golden note of a horn
in forests far away,
blended with the tender
pride
of noble Ladies of long
ago;

And then – the rare charm
of a fresh, triumphant smile,
flowering in swan-like
innocence
and the blushes of a
child-bride;

A nacreous sheen of
white and pink,
a sweet patrician harmony –
all these things I see and
hear
in her Carolingian name.

Puisque l'aube grandit

Puisque l'aube grandit,
puisque voici l'aurore,
Puisque, après m'avoir fui
longtemps, l'espoir veut bien
Revoler devers moi qui
l'appelle et l'implore,
Puisque tout ce bonheur
veut bien être le mien,
Je veux, guidé par vous, beaux
yeux aux flammes douces,
Par toi conduit, ô main où
tremblera ma main,
Marcher droit, que ce soit par
des sentiers de mousses
Ou que rocs et cailloux
encombrent le chemin;

Et comme, pour bercer les
lenteurs de la route,
Je chanterai des airs
ingénus, je me dis
Qu'elle m'écouterait sans
déplaisir sans doute;
Et vraiment je ne veux pas
d'autre Paradis.

La lune blanche luit dans les bois

La lune blanche
Luit dans les bois;
De chaque branche
Part une voix
Sous la ramée ...

Ô bien-aimée.

L'étang reflète,
Profond miroir,
La silhouette
Du saule noir
Où le vent pleure ...

Rêvons, c'est l'heure.

Un vaste et tendre
Apaisement
Semble descendre
Du firmament
Que l'astre irise ...

C'est l'heure exquise.

Since day is breaking

Since day is breaking,
since dawn is here,
since hope, having long
eluded me, would now
return to me and my
implore,
since all this happiness
will truly be mine,
I shall, guided by your fair
eyes' gentle glow,
led by your hand in which I
place my trembling hand,
walk straight ahead, on
mossy paths
or boulder-strewn and
stony tracks;

And while, to ease the
journey's languid pace,
I shall sing some simple
airs, I tell myself
that she will surely hear me
without displeasure;
and truly I crave no other
paradise.

The white moon gleams in the woods

The white moon
gleams in the woods;
from every branch
there comes a voice
beneath the boughs ...

O my beloved.

The pool reflects,
deep mirror,
the silhouette
of the black willow
where the wind is weeping ...

Let us dream, it is the hour.

A vast and tender
consolation
seems to fall
from the sky
the moon illumines ...

Exquisite hour.

J'allais par des chemins perfides

J'allais par des chemins
perfides,
Douloureusement incertain.
Vos chères mains furent mes
guides.

Si pâle à l'horizon lointain
Luisait un faible espoir
d'aurore;
Votre regard fut le matin.

Nul bruit, sinon son pas
sonore,
N'encourageait le voyageur.
Votre voix me dit: 'Marche
encore!'

Mon cœur craintif, mon
sombre cœur
Pleurait, seul, sur la triste
voie;
L'amour, délicieux vainqueur,
Nous a réunis dans la joie.

J'ai presque peur, en vérité

J'ai presque peur, en vérité,
Tant je sens ma vie
enlacée
À la radieuse pensée
Qui m'a pris l'âme l'autre
été,

Tant votre image, à jamais
chère,
Habite en ce cœur tout à
vous,
Ce cœur uniquement jaloux
De vous aimer et de vous
plaître;

Et je tremble, pardonnez-moi
D'aussi franchement vous le
dire,
À penser qu'un mot, qu'un
sourire
De vous est désormais ma
loi,

Et qu'il vous suffirait d'un
geste,
D'une parole ou d'un clin
d'œil,
Pour mettre tout mon être en
deuil

I walked along treacherous ways

I walked along
treacherous ways,
painfully uncertain.
Your dear hands guided
me.

So pale on the far horizon
a faint hope of dawn was
gleaming;
your gaze was the morning.

No sound, save his own
footfall,
encouraged the traveller.
Your voice said: 'Walk
on!'

My fearful heart, my
heavy heart,
wept, lonely along the sad
road;
Love, that charming
conqueror,
has united us in joy.

In truth, I am almost afraid

In truth, I am almost afraid,
so much do I feel my life
bound up
with the radiant thoughts
that captured my soul
last summer,

So deeply does your
ever-dear image
inhabit this heart that is
wholly yours,
this heart, whose sole desire
is to love you and please
you;

And I tremble, forgive me
for telling you so
frankly,
to think that one word,
one smile
from you is henceforth
law to me,

And that one gesture
would suffice,
one word, one single
glance,
to plunge my whole being
in mourning

De son illusion céleste.

from its heavenly illusion.

Mais plutôt je ne veux vous
voir,
L'avenir dût-il m'être
sombre
Et fécond en peines sans
nombre,
Qu'à travers un immense
espoir,

But I would sooner not
see you –
however dark the future
might be
and full of untold
grief –
could I not, through an
immense hope,

Plongé dans ce bonheur
suprême
De me dire encore et
toujours,
En dépit des mornes retours,
Que je vous aime, que je t'aime!

Immersed in this
supreme happiness,
repeat to myself again
and again,
despite bleak reversals,
that I love you, I love thee!

Avant que tu ne t'en ailles

Avant que tu ne t'en ailles,
Pâle étoile du matin,
– Mille cailles
Chantent, chantent dans le
thym. –

Before you fade

Before you fade,
pale morning star,
– a thousand quail
are singing, singing in the
thyme. –

Tourne devers le poète,
Dont les yeux sont pleins
d'amour,
– L'alouette
Monte au ciel avec le
jour. –

Turn to the poet
whose eyes are full of
love,
– the lark
soars heavenward with
the day. –

Tourne ton regard que noie
L'aurore dans son azur;
– Quelle joie
Parmi les champs de blé
mûr! –

Turn your gaze drowned
in the blue of dawn;
– what delight
among the fields of
ripened corn! –

Puis fais luire ma
pensée
Là-bas, – bien loin, oh! bien loin!
– La rosée
Gaîment brille sur le foin. –

And make my thoughts
gleam
yonder, far, ah far away!
– The dew
glints brightly on the hay. –

Dans le doux rêve où
s'agite
Ma mie endormie encor ...
– Vite, vite,
Car voici le soleil d'or. –

Into the sweet dream
where still asleep
my love is stirring ...
– Make haste, make haste,
for here's the golden sun. –

Donc, ce sera par un clair jour d'été

Donc, ce sera par un clair
jour d'été:
Le grand soleil, complice de
ma joie,
Fera, parmi le satin et la
soie,
Plus belle encor votre chère
beauté;

Le ciel tout bleu, comme une
haute tente,
Frisonnera somptueux à
longs plis
Sur nos deux fronts
qu'auront pâlis
L'émotion du bonheur et
l'attente;

Et quand le soir viendra, l'air
sera doux
Qui se jouera, caressant,
dans vos voiles,
Et les regards paisibles des
étoiles
Bienveillamment souriront
aux époux.

N'est-ce pas?

N'est-ce pas? nous irons,
gaies et lents, dans la voie
Modeste que nous
montre en souriant
l'Espoir,
Peu soucieux qu'on nous
ignore ou qu'on nous voie

Isolés dans l'amour ainsi
qu'en un bois noir,
Nos deux cœurs, exhalant
leur tendresse paisible,
Seront deux rossignols qui
chantent dans le soir.

Sans nous préoccuper de ce
que nous destine
Le Sort, nous marcherons
pourtant du même pas,
Et la main dans la main, avec
l'âme enfantine

De ceux qui s'aiment sans
mélange, n'est-ce pas?

So, on a bright summer day it shall be

So, on a bright summer
day it shall be:
the glorious sun, my
partner in joy,
shall make, amid the satin
and the silk,
your dear beauty lovelier
still;

The sky, all blue, like a tall
canopy,
shall quiver sumptuously
in long folds
above our two brows,
grown pale
with pleasure and
expectancy;

And when evening comes,
the breeze shall be soft
and play caressingly
about your veils,
and the peaceful stars
looking down
shall smile benevolently
on man and wife.

Is it not so?

Is it not so? Happy and
unhurried we'll follow
the modest path where
Hope directs us with a
smile,
little caring if we are neither
known nor seen.

Isolated in love as in a
dark wood,
our two hearts, breathing
gentle love,
shall be two nightingales
singing at evening.

With no thought of what
Destiny
has in store, we shall walk
along together,
hand in hand, our souls
like those of children

Whose love is unalloyed,
is that not so?

L'hiver a cessé

L'hiver a cessé: la lumière est
tiède
Et danse, du sol au
firmament clair.
Il faut que le cœur le plus
triste cède
À l'immense joie éparsée dans
l'air.

J'ai depuis un an le
printemps dans l'âme
Et le vert retour du doux
floral,
Ainsi qu'une flamme entoure
une flamme,
Met de l'idéal sur mon idéal.

Le ciel bleu prolonge,
exhausse et couronne
L'immuable azur où rit mon
amour.
La saison est belle et ma part
est bonne
Et tous mes espoirs ont enfin
leur tour.

Que vienne l'été! Que
viennent encore
L'automne et l'hiver! Et
chaque saison
Me sera charmante, ô Toi
que décore
Cette fantaisie et cette
raison!

Winter is over

Winter is over, the light is
soft
and dances up from the
earth to the clear sky.
The saddest heart must
surrender
to the great joy that fills
the air.

For a year I have had
spring in my soul,
and the green return of
sweet May,
like flame encircling
flame,
adds an ideal to my ideal.

The blue sky prolongs,
heightens, and crowns
the steadfast azure where
my love smiles.
The season is fair and my
lot is happy
and all my hopes are at
last fulfilled.

Let summer come! Let
autumn
and winter come too!
Each season
will delight me, O you
graced with
imagination and good
sense!

Interval

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

3 Poems by Walt Whitman (?1925)

Nocturne

Whispers of heavenly death murmur'd I hear,
Labial gossip of night, sibilant chorals,
Footsteps gently ascending, mystical breezes wafted soft
and low,
Ripples of unseen rivers, tides of a current flowing, forever
flowing,
(Or is it the plashing of tears? the measureless waters of
human tears?)

I see, just see skyward, great cloud-masses,
Mournfully, slowly they roll,
Silently swelling and mixing,
With at times a half-dimm'd sadden'd
Far-off star,
Appearing and disappearing.

(Some parturition rather,
Some solemn immortal birth;
On the frontiers to eyes impenetrable,
Some soul is passing over.)

A Clear Midnight

This is thy hour, O Soul, thy free flight into the wordless,
Away from books, away from art, the day erased, the
lesson done,
Thee fully forth emerging, silent, gazing, pondering the
themes thou lovest best,
Night, sleep, death, and the stars.

Joy, Shipmate, Joy!

Joy, shipmate, joy!
(Pleas'd to my soul
At death I cry,
Our life is closed
Our life begins,
The long, long anchorage we leave,
The ship is clear at last, she leaps,
She swiftly courses for the shore.
Joy, shipmate, joy!

On Wenlock Edge (1908-9)

AE Housman

On Wenlock Edge

On Wenlock Edge the wood's in trouble;
His forest fleece the Wrekin heaves;
The gale, it plies the saplings double,
And thick on Severn snow the leaves.

'Twould blow like this through holt and hanger
When Uricon the city stood:
'Tis the old wind in the old anger,
But then it threshed another wood.

Then 'twas before my time, the Roman
At yonder heaving hill would stare:
The blood that warms an English yeoman,
The thoughts that hurt him, they were there.

There, like the wind through woods in riot,
Through him the gale of life blew high;
The tree of man was never quiet:
Then 'twas the Roman, now 'tis I.

The gale, it plies the saplings double,
It blows so hard, 'twill soon be gone:
To-day the Roman and his trouble
Are ashes under Uricon.

From far, from eve and morning

From far, from eve and morning
And yon twelve-winded sky,
The stuff of life to knit me
Blew hither: here am I.

Now – for a breath I tarry
Nor yet disperse apart –
Take my hand quick and tell me,
What have you in your heart.

Speak now, and I will answer;
How shall I help you, say;
Ere to the wind's twelve quarters
I take my endless way.

Is my team ploughing?

'Is my team ploughing,
That I was used to drive
And hear the harness jingle
When I was man alive?'

Ay, the horses trample,
The harness jingles now;
No change though you lie under
The land you used to plough.

'Is my girl happy,
That I thought hard to leave,
And has she tired of weeping
As she lies down at eve?'

Ay, she lies down lightly,
She lies not down to weep:
Your girl is well contented.
Be still, my lad, and sleep.

'Is my friend hearty,
Now I am thin and pine,
And has he found to sleep in
A better bed than mine?'

Yes, lad, I lie easy,
I lie as lads would choose;
I cheer a dead man's sweetheart,
Never ask me whose.

Oh, when I was in love with you

Oh, when I was in love with you,
Then I was clean and brave,
And miles around the wonder grew
How well did I behave.

And now the fancy passes by,
And nothing will remain,
And miles around they'll say that I
Am quite myself again.

Bredon Hill

In summertime on Bredon
The bells they sound so clear;
Round both the shires they ring them
In steeples far and near,
A happy noise to hear.

Here of a Sunday morning
My love and I would lie,
And see the coloured counties,
And hear the larks so high
About us in the sky.

The bells would ring to call her
In valleys miles away;
'Come all to church, good people;
Good people come and pray.'
But here my love would stay.

And I would turn and answer
Among the springing thyme,
'Oh, peal upon our wedding,
And we will hear the chime,
And come to church in time.'

But when the snows at Christmas
On Bredon top were strown,
My love rose up so early
And stole out unbeknown
And went to church alone.

They tolled the one bell only,
Groom there was none to see,
The mourners followed after,
And so to church went she,
And would not wait for me.

The bells they sound on Bredon,
And still the steeples hum,
'Come all to church, good people.' -
O noisy bells, be dumb;
I hear you, I will come.

Clun

Clunton and Clunbury,
Clungunford and Clun,
Are the quietest places
Under the sun.

In valleys of springs of rivers,
By Ony and Teme and Clun,
The country for easy livers,
The quietest under the sun.

We still had sorrows to lighten,
One could not be always glad,
And lads knew trouble at Knighton
When I was a Knighton lad.

By bridges that Thames runs under,
In London, the town built ill,
'Tis sure small matter for wonder
If sorrow is with one still.

And if as a lad grows older
The troubles he bears are more,
He carries his griefs on a shoulder
That handselled them long before.

Where shall one halt to deliver
This luggage I'd lief set down?
Not Thames, not Teme is the river,
Nor London nor Knighton the town:

'Tis a long way further than Knighton,
A quieter place than Clun,
Where doomsday may thunder and lighten
And little 'twill matter to one.