

# WIGMORE HALL

Monday 31 January 2022 1.00pm

**Stuart Jackson** tenor

**Kathryn Stott** piano



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3

**Ivor Gurney** (1890-1937)

Desire in spring (1918)

You are my sky (1920)

The folly of being comforted (1917)

All night under the moon (1917-8)

A cradle song (1920)

I will go with my father a-ploughing (1921)

**Paolo Tosti** (1846-1916)

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**Sergey Rachmaninov** (1873-1943)

No prophet, I Op. 21 No. 11 (1902)

When yesterday we met Op. 26 No. 13 (1906)

How fair this spot Op. 21 No. 7 (1902)

They answered Op. 21 No. 4 (1902)

Beloved, let us fly Op. 26 No. 5 (1906)

What happiness Op. 34 No. 12 (1912)

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**Ivor Gurney** is one of the most intriguing English artistic figures of the early 20th Century – and also, until relatively recently, one of the more neglected. His unusual dual status as prolific composer and poet has paradoxically deprived him of the attention he deserves in either capacity, while his decline into mental illness (he spent the last 15 years of his life in an asylum in Dartford) has sometimes coloured critical assessments. In recent years, however, singers have shown increasing interest in his work, and the revival of his reputation will undoubtedly be hastened by the publication last year of a superb new biography, Kate Kennedy's *Dweller in Shadows*.

Gurney was born in Gloucester where his father ran a tailoring business; he became a chorister at the city's cathedral, then won a scholarship to attend the Royal College of Music as a pupil of Stanford. His studies were interrupted by the First World War, during which he served in France as a private and turned to poetry as his primary means of expression. Invalided out of the army by Easter 1917, he suffered mental collapse, culminating in threats of suicide; though he was discharged from hospital in October 1918 and attempted to resume his musical career in Gloucester, four years later his erratic behaviour forced his family to commit him permanently to institutional care. Remarkably, he continued to compose and write throughout this crisis, and even beyond: in 1925 alone, three years after his confinement, he composed 57 songs, five choral works, two organ pieces, five works for violin, 11 string quartets, a piano sonata and a prelude, as well as much poetry.

Though Gurney produced around 3,000 poems and over 300 songs, he rarely combined his literary and musical talents in a single work, preferring – as in the songs heard today – to set the words of others. Two of the songs in this recital set texts by WB Yeats, one of the poets he most admired: as a young man he contemplated setting Yeats's dramas as a cycle of operas. 'The folly of being comforted' was composed in October 1917, shortly after Gurney had been hospitalised for inhaling poisonous gas. Though it was one of the first songs he had composed for months, he was uncharacteristically pleased with it, noting its 'sorrow of wasting beauty and such tragic passion'. The sparse accompaniment of the final lines and the elongation of the last word help Gurney drive home the text's message. Yeats's 'A cradle song' also elicits an exquisite response: composed in 1920, Gurney's setting draws out the text's tenderness without ever slipping into sentimentality. The other Gurney songs heard today were all composed between 1917 and 1921 and set texts by near-contemporaries, two English and two Irish: among them, Sir John Collings Squire was an influential literary editor who subsequently became a strong supporter of Gurney's work.

**Paolo Tosti** established a career in his native Italy as composer, singing teacher and curator of the court musical archives, before moving to London in 1878. He enjoyed great success in Britain, becoming the Royal Family's singing tutor and Professor of Singing at the Royal Academy of Music. He became a British subject in 1906 and was knighted in 1908, before retiring to Italy for the last four years of his life. He was unusual among Italian composers in showing apparently no interest in opera, while producing formidable quantities of songs: his vocal music runs to 14 volumes in the Ricordi collected edition. The songs heard today were all written after his arrival in London and display the grace and melodic beauty that encouraged singers as famous as Enrico Caruso and Luisa Tetrazzini to champion his work.

**Rachmaninov** is so strongly associated with the piano that the rest of his output is sometimes relatively neglected, but in his early career he was a prolific composer of song. After leaving Russia in the wake of the Revolution, however, he composed no more songs, perhaps because he no longer felt connected to the language that was their inspiration; all but a handful of his 80 or so songs set Russian Romantic poetry.

The composition of Op. 21 in 1902 was financially motivated: Rachmaninov was due to get married in April, and told a friend that he would have to write 'at least twelve songs' in order to have enough money to pay for the wedding. The composer was characteristically self-critical about the result, telling his friend Nikita Morozov that 'I am hanging on to the songs for the time being; they were written very hurriedly and are therefore quite unfinished and quite unbeautiful.' But despite his fears, the songs are highly accomplished and diverse in idiom. 'No prophet, I' packs a punch that belies its brevity, conveying the poet's confidence in his mission with music of equal force. 'How fair this spot' transcends the mediocrity of the poetry through a rapturously lyrical melody that has proved irresistible to instrumentalists as well as singers. 'They answered', meanwhile, wittily conveys the contrast between the grandiose rhetoric of the men's questions in Victor Hugo's poem and the laconic responses of the women.

The Op. 26 set was composed in 1906 and contains some of Rachmaninov's most popular songs: the yearning for the peace of the countryside expressed in 'Beloved, let us fly' was a sentiment with which the composer had personal sympathy; 'When yesterday we met' was a favourite song of Feodor Chaliapin and the only Rachmaninov song he recorded. Today's recital concludes with one of Rachmaninov's finest and most characteristic songs: 'What happiness' registers all the nuances of the text while also displaying an irresistible melodic sweep.

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**Ivor Gurney** (1890-1937)

**Desire in spring** (1918)

*Francis Ledwidge*

I love the cradle-songs the mothers sing  
In lonely places when the twilight drops,  
The slow, endearing melodies that bring  
Sleep to the weeping lids; and, when she stops,  
I love the roadside birds upon the tops  
Of dusty hedges in a world of Spring.

And when the sunny rain drips from the edge  
Of mid-day wind, and meadows lean one way,  
And a long whisper passes thro' the sedge,  
Beside the broken water let me stay,  
While these old airs upon my memory play,  
And silent changes colour up the hedge.

**You are my sky** (1920)

*Sir John Collings Squire*

You are my sky; beneath your circling kindness  
My meadows all take in the light and grow;  
Laugh with the joy you've given,  
The joy you've given,  
And open in a thousand buds, and blow.

But when you are sombre, sad, averse, forgetful  
Heavily veiled by clouds that brood with rain,  
Dumbly I lie all shadowed,  
All shadowed,  
And dumbly wait for you to shine again.

**The folly of being comforted** (1917)

*WB Yeats*

One that is ever kind said yesterday:  
'Your well-beloved's hair has threads of grey,  
And little shadows come about her eyes;  
Time can but make it easier to be wise,  
Though now it's hard, till trouble is at an end;  
And so be patient, be wise and patient, friend.'

But, heart, there is no comfort, not a grain;  
Time can but make her beauty over again,  
Because of that great nobleness of hers;  
The fire that stirs about her, when she stirs,  
Burns but more clearly. O she had not these ways,  
When all the wild summer was in her gaze.

O heart! O heart! If she'd but turn her head,  
You'd know the folly of being comforted.

**All night under the moon** (1917-8)

*Wilfrid Gibson*

All night under the moon  
Plovers are flying  
Over the dreaming meadows of silvery light,  
Over the meadows of June  
Calling and crying,  
Wandering voices of love in the hush of the night.

All night under the moon  
Love, though we are lying  
Quietly under the thatch, in the dreaming light  
Over the meadows of June  
Together we are flying,  
Wandering voices of love in the hush of the night.

**A cradle song** (1920)

*WB Yeats*

The angels are stooping, above your bed;  
They weary of trooping with the whimpering dead.

God's laughing in heaven to see you so good;  
The Shining Seven are gay with His mood.

I kiss you and kiss you, my pigeon my own.  
Ah how I shall miss you when you have grown.

**I will go with my father a-ploughing** (1921)

*Joseph Campbell*

I will go with my father a-ploughing  
To the green field by the sea,  
And the rooks and the crows and the seagulls  
Will come flocking after me.  
I will sing to the patient horses  
With the lark in the white of the air,  
And my father will sing the plough song  
That blesses the cleaving share.

I will go with my father a-sowing  
To the red field by the sea,  
And the rooks and the gulls and the starlings  
Will come flocking after me.  
I will sing to the striding sowers  
With the finch on the greening sloe,  
And my father will sing the seed song  
That only the wise men know.

I will go with my father a-reaping  
To the brown field by the sea,  
And the geese and the crows and the children  
Will come flocking after me.

I will sing to the tan-faced reapers  
With the wren in the heat of the sun,  
And my father will sing the scythe song  
That joys for the harvest done.

## Paolo Tosti (1846-1916)

### Sogno (1886)

*Olindo Guerrini*

Ho sognato che stavi a'  
ginocchi,  
Come un santo che prega il  
Signor ...  
Mi guardavi nel fondo degli  
occhi,  
Sfavillava il tuo sguardo d'amor.

Tu parlavi e la voce sommessa ...  
Mi chiedea dolcemente  
mercè ...  
Solo un guardo che fosse  
promessa,  
Imploravi, curvata al mio piè.

Io tacevo e coll'anima  
forte  
Il desio tentatore lottò.  
Ho provato il martirio e la morte  
Pur mi vinsi e ti dissi di no.

Ma il tuo labbro sfiorò la mia  
faccia ...  
E la forza del cor mi tradì.  
Chiusi gli occhi, ti stesi le  
braccia ...  
Ma, sognavo ... E il bel sogno  
svanì.

### Malìa (1887)

*Rocco Pagliara*

Cosa c'era ne 'l fior che m'hai  
dato?  
Forse un filtro, un arcano  
poter?  
Nel toccarlo, il mio core ha  
tremato,  
M'ha l'olezzo turbato il pensier.  
Ne le vaghe movenze, che ci  
hai?  
Un incanto vien forse con  
te?  
Frema l'aria per dove tu vai,

### Dream

I dreamt that you were on your  
knees  
like a saint praying to the  
Lord.  
You were looking deep into my  
eyes,  
with a glowing look of love.

You were speaking quietly ...  
asking me sweetly for  
forgiveness ...  
that she be allowed just one  
glance,  
you begged, curled at my feet.

I stayed silent and, with a strong  
will,  
fought the irresistible desire.  
I had faced martyrdom and death;  
still, I forced myself to say no.

But then your lips touched my  
face ...  
and my heart betrayed me.  
I closed my eyes, reached out to  
you ...  
but I had been dreaming ... and  
that beautiful dream vanished.

### Enchantment

What was there in that flower  
you gave me?  
Perhaps a love-potion, a  
mysterious power!  
As I touched it, my heart  
trembled,  
its perfume troubled my thoughts!  
What was there in your delicate  
movements?  
Do you bring a magic charm  
with you?  
The air quivers wherever you go,

Spunta un fiore ove passa 'l tuo  
piè.

Io non chiedo qual plaga beata  
Fino adesso soggiorno ti fu:  
Non ti chiedo se Ninfa, se  
Fata,  
Se una bionda parvenza sei tu!  
Ma che c'è nel tuo sguardo  
fatale?  
Cosa ci hai nel tuo magico  
dir?  
Se mi guardi, un'ebbrezza  
m'assale,  
Se mi parli, mi sento  
morir!

### Ideale (1882)

*Carmelo Errico*

Io ti seguì come iride di  
pace  
Lungo le vie del cielo;  
Io ti seguì come un'amica face  
De la notte nel velo.  
E ti sentì ne la luce, ne  
l'aria,  
Nel profumo dei fiori;  
E fu piena la stanza solitaria  
Di te, dei tuoi splendori.

In te rapito, al suon de la tua  
voce,  
Lungamente sognai:  
E de la terra ogni affanno, ogni  
croce,  
In quel giorno scordai.  
Torna, caro ideal, torna un  
istante  
A sorridermi ancora,  
E a me risplenderà, nel tuo  
sembiante,  
Una novella aurora.

### L'ultima canzone (1905)

*Francesco Cimmino*

M'han detto che domani  
Nina, vi fate sposa,  
Ed io vi canto ancor la serenata.  
Là nei deserti piani,  
Là, ne la valle ombrosa,  
Oh quante volte a voi l'ho  
ricantata!

a flower springs at your feet as  
you pass!

I do not ask in which blessed region  
you have lived until now:  
I do not ask if you are a nymph,  
a fairy  
or a fair apparition!  
But what is there in your fateful  
glance?  
What is there in your magical  
words?  
When you look at me, rapture  
overwhelms me,  
when you speak to me, I feel as  
if I am dying!

### Ideal

I followed you like a rainbow of  
peace  
along the paths of heaven;  
I followed you like a friendly torch  
in the veil of night.  
And I sensed you in the light, in  
the air,  
in the perfume of flowers;  
and the solitary room was full  
of you, of your radiance.

Enraptured by you, long I  
dreamed  
of the sound of your voice:  
and every anxiety on earth,  
every torment,  
I forgot on that day.  
Return, dear ideal, return for an  
instant  
to smile at me again,  
and in your face will shine for  
me  
a new dawn.

### The last song

They told me that tomorrow,  
Nina, you will be a bride,  
yet still I sing my serenade to you.  
Up on the barren plateau,  
down in the shady valley,  
oh, how often I have sung it to  
you!

Foglia di rosa,  
O fiore d'amaranto,  
Se ti fai sposa,  
Io ti sto sempre accanto.

Rose petal,  
O flower of amaranth,  
although you become a wife,  
I will always be nearby.

Domani avrete intorno  
Feste sorrisi e fiori,  
Nè penserete ai nostri vecchi  
amori.  
Ma sempre notte e giorno,  
Piena di passione,  
Verrà gemendo a voi la mia  
canzone.

Tomorrow you will be surrounded  
by celebration, smiles and flowers,  
and will not think of our past  
love.  
Yet always, night and day,  
full of passion,  
my song will wail to  
you.

Foglia di menta,  
O fiore di granato,  
Nina, rammenta  
I baci che t'ho dato!  
Ah! ... Ah! ...

Mint flower,  
O flower of pomegranate,  
Nina, remember  
the kisses I gave you!  
Ah! ... Ah! ...

## Sergey Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

### No prophet, I Op. 21 No. 11 (1902)

*Aleksandr Vasilyevich Kruglov*

Ya ne prorok, ya ne  
boyets.  
Ya ne uchitel mira;  
Ya – Bozhei milostyu – pevets,  
Moyu oruzhie – lira.

I am not a prophet, I am not a  
warrior,  
I am not a teacher of the world;  
I am – by the grace of God – a poet,  
my weapon is the lyre.

Ya volyu Gospora tvoryu;  
Soyuza izbegaya s lozhyu  
Ya serdtsu pesnei govoryu,  
Buzhu v nyom iskru  
Bozhyu!

I create what the Lord wills;  
rejecting every kind of lie,  
with my song I speak to the heart,  
igniting there the divine spark of  
God.

### When yesterday we met Op. 26 No. 13 (1906)

*Yakov Polonsky*

Vchera my vstretilis: Ona  
ostanovilas,  
Ya takzhe ... my v glaza drug  
drugu posmotreli ...  
O, Bozhe! kak ona s tekh por  
pereminilas,  
V glazakh potukh ogon, i  
shchyoki pobledneli ...  
I dolgo na neyo glyadel ya  
molcha strogo ...  
Mne ruku protyanuv,  
bednyazhka ulybnulas;  
Ya govorit khotel; ona zhe radi  
Boga,

Yesterday we chanced to meet:  
she stopped,  
so did I ... we looked into each  
other's eyes ...  
Oh God! How she has changed  
since our last meeting,  
her eyes have lost their light,  
her cheeks their colour ...  
for a long time I gazed at her, in  
silence, sternly ...  
the poor thing offered me her  
hand, and gave me a smile;  
I was about to speak, but she  
bade me for God's sake

Velela mne molchat, i tut zhe,  
otvernulas,  
I brovi sdvinula, I vydernula  
ruku,  
I molvila: 'Proshchaite, do  
svidanya!'  
A ya khotel skazat: 'Na  
vechnuyu razluku  
Proshchai, pogibsheye, no miloe  
sozdanye.'

to be still, and quickly turned  
away,  
and frowned, and withdrew her  
hand,  
and spoke: 'Farewell ...  
goodbye ...!'  
And I wanted to say: 'So we  
part forever,  
farewell, thou being, ruined, but  
still dear.'

### How fair this spot Op. 21 No. 7 (1902)

*Glafira Galina*

Zdes khorosho...Vzglyani:  
vdali  
Ognyom gorit reka,  
Tsvetnym kovrom luga  
legli,  
Beleyut oblaka.

Here it's so fine...Look: in the  
distance  
the river glitters like fire,  
the meadows are a carpet of  
colour,  
there are white clouds overhead.

Zdes net lyudei...Zdes  
tishina...  
Zdes tolko Bog da ya.  
Tsvety, da staraya  
sosna,  
Da ty, mechta moyam...

Here there are no people ...it's  
so quiet...  
here are only God and I.  
And the flowers, and the old  
pine tree,  
and you, my dream...

### They answered Op. 21 No. 4 (1902)

*Lev Mey*

Sprosil oni: 'Kak v letuchikh  
chelnakh,  
Nam beloyu chaikoi skolznut na  
volnakh,  
Chob nas storozha ne  
dognali?'  
– Grebite! – one otvechali.

The men asked: 'how, in swift  
boats,  
can we glide over the waves like  
white seagulls,  
to escape the guards who  
pursue us?'  
Row! – the women answered.

Sprosil oni: 'Kak zabyt  
navsegda,  
Chto v mire yudolnom yest  
bednost, beda,  
Chto yest v nyom vrazhda i  
pechali?'  
– Zasnite! – one otvechali.

They asked: 'how can we forget  
for good,  
that in this vale of tears there's  
poverty and trouble,  
malice and  
sorrow?'  
Sleep! – they answered.

Sprosil oni: 'Kak krasavits  
privlech  
Bez chary: chtob sami, na  
strastnuyu rech,  
One nam v obyatiya pali?'  
– Lyubite! – one otvechali.

They asked: 'how can we win  
pretty women  
without spells: so our  
passionate words alone  
will make them fall into our arms?'  
Love! – they answered.

## Beloved, let us fly Op. 26 No. 5 (1906)

*Arseny Golenishchev-Kutuzov*

Pokinem, milaya, shumyashchii krug stolitsy. Pora v rodimyi krai, pora v lesnuyu glush! Ty slyshish? – nas zovyot na volyu iz teminitsy Vesny pobednoi shum i penyey ptits...	Darling, let's quit the noisy capital, escape to the countryside we love, to the quiet forest! Can you hear it? – they're calling us to break free, these sounds of spring triumphant and singing birds...
K chemu zh nam usmirat dushi volshebnye poryvvy? Il razlyubila ty zhelteyushchie nivy, I roshchi svezhie, i khmurye lesa,	Why then, suppress the magic outburst of the soul? Or have you lost your love for fields of yellow grain, and fresh groves and darkling woods,
Gde, pomnish, my vdvoyom zadumchivo bluzhdali V vechernii chas, kogda temneyut nebesa, I molcha brodit vsor v tumane spyashchei dali?	Where the two of us, – remember? – wandered pensively one evening hour, as the sky grew dark, and gazed in silence at the sleepy misty distance?

## What happiness Op. 34 No. 12 (1912)

*Afanasy Afanasiyevich Fet*

Kakoe schastye: i noch, i my odni! Reka – kak zerkalo i vsya blestit zvezdami, A tam-to, golovu zakin-ka da vzglyani: Kakaya glubina i chistota nad nami!	What happiness: it's night, and we're alone! The river is like a mirror, all glistening with stars, and there on high, lean your head back and look up: what profundity and purity is overhead!
O, nazyvai menya bezumnym! Nazovi, Chem khochesh: v etot mig ya razumom slabeyu I v serdtse chuvstvuyu takoi priliv lyubvi, Chto ne mogu molchat ne stanu, ne umeyu!	Oh, call me crazy! Call me what you will: at this moment reason fails me and in my heart I feel such a surge of love I can't keep silent, I won't, I'm not able!
Y bolen, ya vlyublyon, no muchas i lyubya, – O, slyushai! o, poimi! – ya strasti ne skryvayu, I ya khochu skazat, chto ya lyublyu tebya, Tebya, odnu tebya lyublyu ya i zhelayu!	I'm sick, I'm in love, but, tormented and loving – O, listen! O hear me! – I can't hide this passion, and I want to say I love you, it's you, it's you alone I love and desire!

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