

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 3 October 2026
7.30pm

Robin Tritschler tenor
Claire Barnett-Jones mezzo-soprano
James Baillieu piano

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Um Mitternacht (?1960) from *The Red Cockatoo & other songs*
(1935-62)

6 Hölderlin-Fragmente Op. 61 (1958)

*No. 1 Menschenbeifall • No. 2 Die Heimat •
No. 3 Sokrates und Alcibiades • No. 4 Die Jugend •
No. 5 Hälfte des Lebens • No. 6 Die Linien des Lebens*

A Charm of Lullabies Op. 41 (1947)

*No. 1 A Cradle Song • No. 2 The Highland Balou •
No. 3 Sephestia's Lullaby • No. 4 A Charm •
No. 5 The Nurse's Song*

Interval

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Liederkreis Op. 24 (1840)

*No. 1 Morgens steh' ich auf und frage • No. 2 Es treibt
mich hin • No. 3 Ich wandelte unter den Bäumen •
No. 4 Lieb' Liebchen • No. 5 Schöne Wiege meiner
Leiden • No. 6 Warte, warte, wilder Schiffmann •
No. 7 Berg' und Burgen schaun herunter •
No. 8 Anfangs wollt' ich fast verzagen • No. 9 Mit Myrten
und Rosen*

Benjamin Britten

Cabaret songs (1937-9)

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



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Goethe's *Um Mitternacht*, inaugurating his late style, encompasses his life from youth to unafraid embrace of death to come. The first stanza tells of impetuous youth via anacoluthon (scrambled grammar and syntax); the dizzied diving in different directions lessens until breadth of vision reigns in the final 'old age' stanza. **Britten** shapes his setting as a structure that adds up to a whole via all 12 tones of the chromatic scale. The *de profundis* bass chords disappear at the end: transcendence is near.

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Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843), one of Germany's greatest poets, is at his best literally incomparable: he belongs to no movement, resists categorisations and composed his mature verse in a mere six years, before madness intervened. He sought to amalgamate the spiritual strength of Greek civilisation with the ideals of German nationhood and Christian religion. Like Schiller, who lamented the lost beauty of the Hellenic world in *Die Götter Griechenlands* ('Schöne Welt, wo bist du?'), Hölderlin believed passionately in his mission of regenerating Germany in what he regarded to be an unspiritual age. Like Mayrhofer, he felt tragically unable to fulfil the task.

Benjamin Britten composed the *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente* in late 1958 and dedicated them to Prince Ludwig of Hesse, a great admirer of Hölderlin's poetry, to mark his 50th birthday. The work was premièred by Peter Pears and the composer on 20 November 1958 at Schloss Wolfsgarten near Darmstadt, where Britten was later to write much of *Death in Venice*. The title is something of a misnomer, because there is nothing fragmentary about these great poems.

'Menschenbeifall' juxtaposes the heightened sensitivity of a man in love with the vacuity and uncouthness of the unloving mob. The celebrated opening lines of verse two anticipate the equally famous opening of Goethe's 'Selige Sehnsucht', written a little over a decade later in 1814: 'Sagt es niemand, nur den Weisen,/Weil die Menge gleich verhöhnet' (Tell it to no one, only the wise,/For the mob will quickly mock). Britten points the contrast by using a chain of perfect fourths for the opening page that fade to minor thirds at the mention of the uncomprehending masses.

The text of 'Die Heimat' is obliquely biographical. The sailor, who returns home with a rich harvest of goods (spices?) from distant isles, is contrasted with the meagre harvest of the poet, who has gleaned nothing but suffering. Hölderlin published little in his lifetime and it was not until 1846, three years after his death, that his *Sämtliche Werke* appeared and he acquired a reputation as a great poet. 'Stillt ihr der

Liebe Leiden?' he asks in verse two, and this cry from the heart reflects Hölderlin's own lack of success in affairs of the heart. Britten's setting of 'Die Heimat' starts lyrically (the marking is 'ruhig fliessend' – quietly flowing), and the pianist is instructed to use the sustaining pedal, but the *pianissimo* beginning rises to a *fortissimo* outburst, as the poet longs for the peace he once enjoyed in the forests of his childhood.

Hölderlin's 'Sokrates und Alcibiades' changes the passage in Plato's *Symposium* in which the beautiful young Athenian general eulogises the older philosopher, and instead it describes Socrates's chaste love for the beautiful young man. Britten's use of the triad as a symbol of beauty can be heard in the serene chords that accompany Socrates's reply.

'Die Jugend' describes the young poet's education at the hands of the gods. According to Greek legend Selene (latin Luna), goddess of the moon, loved the beautiful shepherd Endymion who was granted eternal sleep and eternal youth by Zeus. Each night Luna visited her lover in a cave on Mount Latmus.

'Hälfte des Lebens' contrasts two scenes: one actual and idyllic (verse one), the other cold and comfortless. The luxuriance of stanza one, where the nouns are described with sensuous adjectives, yields in stanza two to a bleakness where nouns are shorn of adjectives. Verse one unfolds in one long, controlled sentence, whereas verse two is disrupted by staccato commas and groping assonance ('Weh', 'wo', 'wenn', 'Winter', 'wo').

Britten points the meaning of 'Die Linien des Lebens', which was written at the height of Hölderlin's madness, by allowing the piano accompaniment to move without any regard for harmony, until the final line restores tonal order as an illustration of the poet's 'With harmonies and eternal recompense and peace'.

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The music of Robert Schumann played a significant role in Benjamin Britten's performing career. He made celebrated recordings of Schumann's secular oratorio *Szenen aus Goethes Faust* (as conductor) and song cycle *Dichterliebe* (as pianist), and regularly performed his Lieder in recitals with the tenor Peter Pears, often in combination with his own music. Tonight's concert follows a similar pattern: two of Britten's collections for female voice and one of his song cycles are heard alongside Schumann's first major vocal work.

While Pears remained Britten's greatest vocal inspiration, he also produced collections for other singers. One was the mezzo-soprano Nancy Evans, for whom he wrote *A Charm of Lullabies* (1947): a setting

of five texts culled from *A Book of Lullabies 1300-1900*. Their tone is often dark: 'A Cradle Song' refers to infants' 'cunning wiles'; the mother in 'A Highland Balou' envisages her son becoming a horse thief; Sephestia in 'Sephestia's Lullaby' has been deserted by her child's father; and the sleepless baby in 'A Charm' is threatened with dire punishments. Britten's settings capture perfectly the poems' nuances and contrasting ambiances. Striking features include delicately acerbic harmonies in 'A Cradle Song', 'Scots snap' rhythms and folklike vocal ornaments in 'A Highland Balou', pianistic imitations of wailing and dramatic tempo changes in 'Sephestia's Lullaby', menacing shifts in register in 'A Charm' and haunting unaccompanied passages in 'The Nurse's Song' – the only number to express unqualified tenderness.

Unlike Britten, **Schumann** initially considered that song was inferior to instrumental music. He changed his mind in 1840 when he discovered – as he told his fiancée Clara Wieck – 'what bliss it is to write for the voice'. During that year he composed more than 130 Lieder, including several major cycles. The first to be completed, in February 1840, was *Liederkreis* Op. 24, which sets nine poems from the 'Junge Leiden' (Young Sorrows) section of Heinrich Heine's poetry collection *Buch der Lieder* (1827). Heine's preoccupations with loss and separation will have struck a chord with the composer, who was then living far from his beloved Clara, and engaged in a legal battle with her father for the right to marry her.

Like the later Heine cycle *Dichterliebe*, *Liederkreis* explores romantic disappointment. A young man is rejected by his beloved. Grief-stricken, he determines to leave the 'beautiful city' where they met. He meditates leaving Europe too, but instead sails away down the Rhine, still haunted by his lost love. However, in the penultimate song he pulls himself together – to

the strains of a Bach chorale – and subsequently resolves to turn his grief into vital poetry.

Schumann's settings contain much expressive word-painting, including a dramatic harmonic modulation as the birds answer the young man in 'Ich wandelte unter den Bäumen', off-beat piano chords mimicking his throbbing heart in 'Lieb' Liebchen', and pounding keyboard octaves and a frenetic vocal line conveying his fury in 'Warte, warte, wilder Schiffmann'. Several of the songs are also notable for their melodic beauty, not least the alternately pensive and impassioned 'Schöne Wiege meiner Leiden' and the closing 'Mit Myrten und Rosen', whose ardent central outburst gives way to a gently nostalgic piano postlude.

The programme concludes with **Britten's** four *Cabaret Songs*, which he wrote in the late 1930s for the actress and singer Hedli Anderson. Their inventive texts are by WH Auden, with whom the composer collaborated intensively for several years. The collection begins joyfully with 'Calypso', an exhilarating depiction of a train ride to a romantic rendezvous, featuring virtuoso display for both singer and pianist. 'Tell me the Truth about Love' is a comic interrogation of the nature of love, whose conversational verses alternate with a lazily jazzy refrain. Like Kurt Weill's hit song 'Surabaya Johnny' (1929), 'Johnny' describes a woman's doomed love for a rogue. Humorous early verses parodying musical theatre and opera contrast with a dark-hued, mournful refrain and final section. Speaking of mourning, we end with tragedy in the final song 'Funeral Blues', which gradually builds to a despairing climax featuring sweeping piano glissandi. Auden's text achieved widespread fame thanks to the 1994 film *Four Weddings and a Funeral*.

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Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Um Mitternacht (?1960) At Midnight
from *The Red*
Cockatoo & other
songs (1935-62)
Johann Wolfgang von
Goethe

Um Mitternacht ging ich, nicht eben gerne, Klein kleiner Knabe, jenen Kirchhof hin Zu Vaters Haus, des Pfarrers; Stern am Sterne, Sie leuchteten doch alle gar zu schön; Um Mitternacht.	At midnight, as a very little boy, I would walk, far from willingly, past that churchyard to father's vicarage; star on star, how beautifully they all shone; at midnight.
Wenn ich dann ferner in des Lebens Weite Zur Liebsten musste, musste, weil sie zog, Gestirn und Nordschein über mir im Streite, Ich gehend, kommend Seligkeiten sog; Um Mitternacht.	When further on in life I had to go to my beloved, had to because she drew me on, I saw the stars and Northern Lights compete; I came, I went, drinking in her bliss; at midnight.
Bis dann zuletzt des vollen Mondes Helle So klar und deutlich mir ins Finstere drang, Auch der Gedanke, willig, sinnig, schnelle Sich ums Vergangne wie ums Künftige schlang; Um Mitternacht.	Until at last the moon's full radiance pierced my darkness so clearly and brightly, that also my thoughts, willingly, meaningfully, swiftly embraced the past and the future; at midnight.

6 Hölderlin-Fragmente Op. 61 (1958)
Friedrich Hölderlin

No. 1 Menschenbeifall The applause of
men

Ist nicht heilig mein Herz, schöneren Lebens voll, Seit ich liebe? Warum achtetet ihr mich mehr, Da ich stolzer und wilder Wortereicher und leerer war?	Love has hallowed my heart, filled it with fairer life, filled it with beauty. Why then did you esteem me more, in my arrogant wilderness, rich in empty resounding words?
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Ach! der Menge gefällt, was auf den Marktplatz taugt, Und es ehret der Knecht nur den Gewaltsamen; An das Göttliche glauben Die allein, die es selber sind.	Ah! the masses delight in ev'ry cheap device, and the servile obey nought but a tyranny; they acknowledge the godlike – only they, who themselves are gods.
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No. 2 Die Heimat Home

Froh kehrt der Schiffer heim an den stillen Strom Von fernen Inseln, wo er geerntet hat. Wohl möcht auch ich zur; Heimat wieder; Aber was hab ich, wie Leid, geerntet?	With joy the fisher steers into quiet port from distant islands, where he has harvested. So too would I be turning homewards; ah, but what have I, save grief, for harvest?
Ihr holden Ufer, die ihr mich auferzogt, Stillt ihr der Liebe Leiden? ach gebt ihr mir, Ihr Wälder meiner Kindheit! wann ich Komme, die Ruhe noch einmal wieder?	Ye blessed shores, the guardians of my youth, can you not ease my longing? Then give me back, you forests of my childhood, at my coming, that peace which once you gave me!

No. 3 Sokrates und
Alcibiades Socrates and
Alcibiades

Warum huldigst du, heiliger Sokrates, Diesem Jünglinge stets? kennest du Grössers nicht? Warum siehet mit Liebe, Wie auf Götter, dein Aug' auf ihn?	And why favourest thou, holy Socrates, such a stripling as this? Know'st thou no higher things? And why gazest upon him like an immortal, with eyes of love?
Wer das Tiefste gedacht, liebt das Lebendigste, Hohe Tugend versteht, wer in die Welt geblickt, Und es neigen die Weisen Oft am Ende zu Schönerm sich.	Who most deeply enquires, loves what is liveliest, and true Virtue perceives, who has observed the world, and at moments the sages must be yielding to Beauty itself.

No. 4 Die Jugend

Youth

Da ich ein Knabe war,
Rettet' ein Gott mich oft
Vom Geschrei und der
Ruthe der Menschen,
Da spielt' ich sicher und gut
Mit den Blumen des Hains,
Und die Lüftchen des
Himmels
Spielten mit mir.

When I was still a boy
I was saved by a god
from the noise and the
bruises of mankind.
I played securely and free
with the flowers of the fields,
and the breezes of
heaven
sported with me.

Und wie du das Herz
Der Pflanzen erfreust,
Wenn sie entgegen dir
Die zarten Arme
streken,
So hast du mein Herz
erfreut,
Vater Helios! und, wie
Endymion,
War ich dein Liebling,
Heilige Luna!

And as you delight
the hearts of the flowers
when they incline to you,
their tender arms
outstretching,
so you filled my heart
with joy,
Father Helios! And, like
Endymion,
I was your darling
heavenly Luna!

O all ihr treuen
Freundlichen Götter!
Dass ihr wüsstet,
Wie euch meine Seele
geliebt!

O all you friendly
faithful Immortals!
Could I tell you
how belov'd you were to
my heart!

Mich erzog der Wohllaut
Des säuselnden Hains
Und lieben lernt' ich
Unter den Blumen.
Im Arme der Götter wuchs
ich gross.

I was taught the songs
of the whispering trees
and amid the flowers
I learnt the art of love.
The arms of the gods
made me a man.

No. 5 Hälfte des Lebens

The middle of life

Mit gelben Birnen
hänget
Und voll mit wilden Rosen
Das Land in den See,
Ihr holden Schwäne,
Und trunken von Küssen
Tunkt ihr das Haupt
Ins heilignüchterne
Wasser.

With golden fruit it hangs
there
and full of wild roses
the land into the lake,
ye gentle swans,
and drunken with kissing
dip your heads
into the pure hallowed
water.

Weh mir, wo nehm' ich, wenn
Es Winter ist, die Blumen,
und wo
Den Sonnenschein
Und Schatten der Erde?
Die Mauern stehn
Sprachlos und kalt, im
Winde
Klirren die Fahnen.

Alas! where are they, in
the winter time, the
flowers, and where
the shining sun
and shadows of the Earth?
The walls stand there
speechless and cold, the
wind sets
weather-vanes clatt'ring.

No. 6 Die Linien des Lebens

Lines of life

Die Linien des Lebens sind
verschieden,
Wie Wege sind, und wie der
Berge Grenzen.
Was hier wir sind, kann dort
ein Gott ergänzen,
Mit Harmonien und ew'gem
Lohn und Frieden.

Each line of life is
different from another,
as rivers are, or like the
mountain ranges.
What we are here is there
by God completed
with harmony, reward
and peace eternal.

A Charm of Lullabies Op. 41 (1947)

I. A Cradle Song

William Blake

Sleep! sleep! beauty bright,
Dreaming o'er the joys of night;
Sleep! sleep! in thy sleep
Little sorrows sit and weep.

Sweet babe, in thy face
Soft desires I can trace,
Secret joys and secret smiles,
Little pretty infant wiles.

O! the cunning wiles that creep
In thy little heart asleep.
When thy little heart does wake
Then the dreadful lightnings break,

From thy cheek and from thy eye,
O'er the youthful harvests nigh.
Infant wiles and infant smiles
Heaven and Earth of peace beguiles.

II. The Highland Balou

Robert Burns

Hee Balou, my sweet wee Donald,
Picture o' the great Clanronald!
Brawlie kens our wanton Chief
What gat my young Highland thief.

Leeze me on thy bonnie craigie!
And thou live, thou'll steal a naigie,
Travel the country thro' and thro',
And bring hame a Carlisle cow!

Thro' the Lawlands, o'er the Border,
Weel, my babie, may thou furdur!
Herry the louns o' the laigh Countrie,
Syne to the Highlands hame to me!

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

III. Sephestia’s Lullaby

Robert Greene

Weep not, my wanton, smile upon my knee;
When thou art old there’s grief enough for thee.

Mother’s wag, pretty boy,
Father’s sorrow, father’s joy;
When thy father first did see
Such a boy by him and me,
He was glad, I was woe;
Fortune changèd made him so,
When he left his pretty boy,
Last his sorrow, first his joy.

Weep not ...

The wanton smiled, father wept,
Mother cried, baby leapt;
More he crowèd, more we cried,
Nature could not sorrow hide:
He must go, he must kiss
Child and mother, baby bliss,
For he left his pretty boy,
Father’s sorrow, father’s joy.

Weep not

IV. A Charm

Thomas Randolph

Quiet!
Sleep! or I will make
Erinnys whip thee with a snake,
And cruel Rhadamanthus take
Thy body to the boiling lake,
Where fire and brimstones never slake;
Thy heart shall burn, thy head shall ache,
And ev’ry joint about thee quake;
And therefor dare not yet to wake!
Quiet, sleep!
Quiet, sleep!
Quiet!

Quiet!
Sleep! or thou shalt see
The horrid hags of Tartary,
Whose tresses ugly serpants be,
And Cerberus shall bark at thee,
And all the Furies that are three
The worst is called Tisiphone,
Shall lash thee to eternity;
And therefore sleep thou peacefully
Quiet, sleep!
Quiet, sleep!
Quiet!

V. The Nurse’s Song

John Philip

Lullaby baby,
Lullaby baby,
Thy nurse will tend thee as duly as may be.
Lullaby baby!

Be still, my sweett sweeting, no longer do cry;
Sing lullaby baby, lullaby baby.
Let dolours be fleeting, I fancy thee, I ...
To rock and to lull thee I will not delay me.

Lullaby baby,
Lullabylabylaby baby,
Thy nurse will tend thee as duly as may be
Lullabylabylaby baby

The gods be thy shield and comfort in need!
The gods be thy shield and comfort in need!
Sing Lullaby baby,
Lullabylaby baby

They give thee good fortune and well for to speed,
And this to desire ... I will not delay me.
This to desire ... I will not delay me.

Lullaby lullaby
Lullaby baby,
Thy nurse will tend thee as duly as may be.
Lullabylabylabylaby baby.

Interval

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Liederkreis Op. 24 (1840) Heinrich Heine	Song cycle
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No. 1 Morgens steh’ ich auf und frage	Every morning I wake and ask
Morgens steh’ ich auf und frage: Kommt feins Liebchen heut? Abends sink’ ich hin und klage: Ausblieb sie auch heut.	Every morning I wake and ask: will my sweetheart come today? Every evening I lie down, complaining she stayed away.
In der Nacht mit meinem Kummer Lieg’ ich schlaflos, lieg’ ich wach; Träumend, wie im halben Schlummer, Wandle ich bei Tag.	All night long with my grief I lie sleepless, lie awake; dreaming, as if half asleep, I wander through the day.

No. 2 Es treibt mich hin I'm driven this way

Es treibt mich hin, es treibt mich her!
Noch wenige Stunden, dann soll ich sie schauen,
Sie selber, die schönste der schönen Jungfrauen; –
Du armes Herz, was pochst du schwer?

I'm driven this way, driven that!
A few more hours, and I shall see her,
she, the fairest of the fair –
faithful heart, why pound so hard?

Die Stunden sind aber ein faules Volk!
Schleppen sich behaglich träge,
Schleichen gähnend ihre Wege; –
Tumme dich, du faules Volk!

But the Hours are a lazy breed!
They dawdle along and take their time,
crawl yawningly on their way –
get a move on, you lazy breed!

Tobende Eile mich treibend erfasst!
Aber wohl niemals liebten die Horen; –
Heimlich im grausamen Bunde verschworen,
Spotten sie tückisch der Liebenden Hast.

Raging haste drives me onward!
But the Horae can never have loved –
cruelly and secretly in league,
they spitefully mock a lover's haste.

No. 3 Ich wandelte unter den Bäumen I wandered among the trees

Ich wandelte unter den Bäumen
Mit meinem Gram allein;
Da kam das alte Träumen,
Und schlich mir ins Herz hinein.

I wandered among the trees,
alone with my own grief,
but then the old dreams returned
and stole into my heart.

Wer hat euch dies Wörtlein gelehret,
Ihr Vöglein in luftiger Höh'?

Schweigt still! wenn mein Herz es höret,
Dann tut es noch einmal so weh.

Who taught you this little word,
you birds up there in the breeze?

Be silent! If my heart hears it,
my pain will return once more.

„Es kam ein Jungfräulein gegangen,
Die sang es immerfort,
Da haben wir Vöglein gefangen
Das hübsche, goldne Wort.“

'A young woman once passed by,
she sang it again and again,
and we birds snatched it up,
that lovely golden word.'

Das sollt ihr mir nicht erzählen,
Ihr Vöglein wunderschlau;
Ihr wollt meinen Kummer mir stehlen,
Ich aber niemandem trau'.

You shouldn't tell me such things,
you wondrously cunning birds,
you thought to steal my grief from me,
but I trust no one.

No. 4 Lieb' Liebchen My love

Lieb Liebchen, leg's Händchen aufs Herze mein; –
Ach, hörst du, wie's pochet im Kämmerlein?
Da hauset ein Zimmermann schlimm und arg,
Der zimmert mir einen Totensarg.

Lay your hand on my heart, my love; –
ah, can you not hear it throbbing?
A wicked, evil carpenter's there,
fashioning me my coffin.

Es hämmert und klopft bei Tag und bei Nacht;
Es hat mich schon längst um den Schlaf gebracht.
Ach! sputet Euch, Meister Zimmermann,
Damit ich balde schlafen kann.

He bangs and hammers day and night;
the noise has long since robbed me of sleep.
Ah! master carpenter, make haste,
so that I soon might sleep.

No. 5 Schöne Wiege meiner Leiden

Schöne Wiege meiner
Leiden,
Schönes Grabmal meiner
Ruh,
Schöne Stadt, wir müssen
scheiden, –
Lebe wohl! ruf' ich dir zu.

Lebe wohl, du heil'ge
Schwelle,
Wo da wandelt Liebchen
traut;
Lebe wohl! du heil'ge Stelle,
Wo ich sie zuerst geschaut.

Hätt' ich dich doch nie
gesehen,
Schöne Herzenskönigin!
Nimmer wär es dann
geschehen,
Dass ich jetzt so elend bin.

Nie wollt' ich dein Herze
rühren,
Liebe hab' ich nie erlebt;
Nur ein stilles Leben
führen
Wollt' ich, wo dein Odem
weht.

Doch du drängst mich selbst
von hinnen,
Bittere Worte spricht dein
Mund;
Wahnsinn wühlt in meinen
Sinnen,
Und mein Herz ist krank und
wund.

Und die Glieder matt und
träge
Schlepp' ich fort am
Wanderstab,
Bis mein müdes Haupt ich
lege
Ferne in ein kühles Grab.

Lovely cradle of my sorrows

Lovely cradle of my
sorrows,
lovely tombstone of my
peace,
lovely city, we must
part –
farewell! I call to you.

Farewell, O sacred
threshold,
where my dear beloved
treads,
farewell! O sacred spot,
where I first beheld her.

Had I never seen you
though,
fair queen of my heart!
It would never then have
happened
that I'm now so wretched.

I never wished to touch
your heart,
I never begged for love;
to live in peace was all I
wished,
and to breathe the air you
breathe.

But you yourself drive me
away,
your lips speak bitter
words;
madness rages in my
mind,
and my heart is sick and
wounded.

And my limbs, weary and
feeble,
I drag along, staff in
hand,
until I lay my tired head
down
in a cool and distant grave.

No. 6 Warte, warte, wilder Schiffmann

Warte, warte, wilder
Schiffmann,
Gleich folg' ich zum Hafen
dir;
Von zwei Jungfrauen nehm'
ich Abschied,
Von Europa und von Ihr.

Blutquell, rinn' aus meinen
Augen,
Blutquell, brich aus meinem
Leib,
Dass ich mit dem heissen Blute
Meine Schmerzen
niederschreib'.

Ei, mein Lieb, warum just
heute
Schaudert dich, mein Blut zu
sehn?
Sahst mich bleich und
herzeblutend
Lange Jahre vor dir stehn!

Kennst du noch das alte
Liedchen
Von der Schlang' im
Paradies,
Die durch schlimme
Apfelgabe
Unsern Ahn ins Elend
stiess?

Alles Unheil brachten
Äpfel!
Eva bracht' damit den Tod,
Eris brachte Trojas
Flammen,
Du bracht'st beides, Flamm'
und Tod.

Wait, O wait, wild sailor

Wait, O wait, wild
sailor,
soon I'll follow to the
harbour;
I'm taking leave of two
maidens,
of Europe and of her.

Stream from my eyes, O
blood,
gush from my body, O
blood,
that with my hot blood
I may write down my
agonies.

Why today of all days, my
love,
do you shudder to see my
blood?
You've seen me pale with
bleeding heart
before you for years on end!

Do you remember the old
story
of the serpent in
Paradise,
who, through the evil gift
of an apple,
plunged our forbears into
woe?

The apple's the cause of
all our ills!
Eve brought death with it,
Eris brought flames to
Troy,
And you – both flames
and death.

No. 7 Berg' und Burgen schaun herunter

Berg und Burgen schau'n
herunter
In den spiegelhellen Rhein,
Und mein Schiffchen segelt
munter,
Rings umglänzt von
Sonnenschein.

Ruhig seh' ich zu dem Spiele
Goldner Wellen, kraus bewegt;
Still erwachen die Gefühle,
Die ich tief im Busen hegt'.

Freundlich grüssend und
verheissend
Lockt hinab des Stromes
Pracht;
Doch ich kenn' ihn, oben
gleissend,
Birgt sein Innres Tod und
Nacht.

Oben Lust, im Busen
Tücken,
Strom, du bist der Liebsten
Bild!
Die kann auch so freundlich
nicken,
Lächelt auch so fromm und
mild.

No. 8 Anfangs wollt' ich fast verzagen

Anfangs wollt ich fast verzagen,
Und ich glaubt', ich trüg' es
nie;
Und ich hab' es doch
getragen –
Aber fragt mich nur nicht, wie?

No. 9 Mit Myrten und Rosen

Mit Myrten und Rosen,
lieblich und hold,
Mit duft'gen Zypressen und
Flittergold,
Möcht' ich zieren dies Buch
wie 'nen Totenschrein,
Und sargen meine Lieder
hinein.

Mountains and castles

Mountains and castles
look down
into the mirror-bright Rhine,
and my boat sails merrily
on,
with sunshine glistening
all around.

Calmly I watch the play
of golden, ruffled waves;
quietly the feelings awaken
I'd nursed deep in my heart.

With friendly greetings
and promises
the river's splendour
beckons me;
but I know how, gleaming
above,
it hides death and night
within.

On the surface – pleasure, at
heart – malice,
river, how you resemble
my love!
She too can be kind and
friendly,
smiles her gentle,
innocent smile.

At first I almost lost heart

At first I almost lost heart,
and thought I could never
bear it;
and yet I have borne
it –
only do not ask me how.

With myrtles and roses

With myrtles and roses,
sweet and fair,
with fragrant cypress and
golden tinsel,
I should like to adorn this
book like a coffin
and bury my songs
within.

O könnt' ich die Liebe
sargen hinzu!
Auf dem Grabe der Liebe
wächst Blümlein der Ruh',
Da blüht es hervor, da
pflückt man es ab, –
Doch mir blüht's nur, wenn
ich selber im Grab.

Hier sind nun die Lieder, die
einst so wild,
Wie ein Lavastrom, der dem
Ätna entquillt,
Hervorgestürzt aus dem
tiefsten Gemüt,
Und rings viel blitzende
Funken versprüht!

Nun liegen sie stumm und
totengleich,
Nun starren sie kalt und
nebelbleich,
Doch aufs neu' die alte Glut
sie belebt,
Wenn der Liebe Geist einst
über sie schwebt.

Und es wird mir im Herzen
viel Ahnung laut:
Der Liebe Geist einst über
sie taut;
Einst kommt dies Buch in
deine Hand,
Du süßes Lieb im fernen
Land.

Dann löst sich des Liedes
Zauberbann,
Die blassen Buchstaben
schaun dich an,
Sie schauen dir flehend ins
schöne Aug',
Und flüstern mit Wehmut
und Liebeshauch.

Could I but bury my love
here too!
On Love's grave grows
the flower of peace,
there it blossoms, there is
plucked,
but only when I'm buried
will it bloom for me.

Here now are the songs,
which once
streamed like lava from
Etna,
wildly from the depths of
my soul,
scattering sparks all
around!

Now they lie mute, as
though dead,
now they stare coldly, as
pale as mist,
but the old glow shall
revive them again,
when one day Love's
spirit floats over them.

And a thought speaks
loudly in my heart:
that Love's spirit will one
day thaw them;
one day this book will fall
into your hands,
my sweetest love, in a
distant land.

And on that day the spell
will break,
the pale letters will gaze
at you,
gaze imploringly into
your beautiful eyes,
and whisper with sadness
and the breath of love.

Benjamin Britten

Cabaret songs (1937-9)

WH Auden

Calypso

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

Fly like the aeroplane, don't pull up short
Till you brake for Grand Central Station, New York.

For there in the middle of that waiting hall
Should be standing the one that I love best of all.

If he's not there to meet me when I get to town,
I'll stand on the pavement with tears rolling down.

For he is the one that I love to look on,
The acme of kindness and perfection.

He presses my hand and he says he loves me
Which I find an admirable peculiarity.

The woods are bright green on both sides of the line;
The trees have their loves though they're different from mine.

But the poor fat old banker in the sun-parlour car
Has no one to love him except his cigar.

If I were the head of the Church or the State
I'd powder my nose and just tell them to wait.

For love's more important and powerful than
Even a priest or a politician.

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.
Some say it makes the world go round, and some say
that's absurd.

But when I asked the man next door, who looked as if he
knew,
His wife was very cross indeed, and said it wouldn't do.

Does it look like a pair of pyjamas, or the ham in a
temperance hotel?

O tell me the truth about love!

Does its odour remind one of llamas, or has it a
comforting smell?

O tell me the truth about love!

Is it prickly to touch as a hedge is, or soft as eiderdown
fluff?

Is it sharp or quite smooth at the edges?

O tell me the truth about love!

I looked inside the summer-house, it wasn't ever there,
I've tried the Thames at Maidenhead and Brighton's

bracing air;

I don't know what the blackbird sang or what the roses
said,

But it wasn't in the chicken-run or underneath the bed.

Can it pull extraordinary faces, is it usually sick on a
swing?

O tell me the truth about love!

Does it spend all its time at the races, or fiddling with
pieces of string?

O tell me the truth about love!

Has it views of its own about money, does it think
Patriotism enough?

Are its stories vulgar but funny?

O tell me the truth about love!

Your feelings when you meet it I'm told you can't forget.
I've sought it since I was a child, but haven't found it yet.

I'm getting on for thirty-five, but still I do not know

What kind of creature it can be that bothers people so.

When it comes, will it come without warning just as I'm
picking my nose?

O tell me the truth about love!

Will it knock on my door in the morning, or tread in the
bus on my toes?

O tell me the truth about love!

Will it come like a change in the weather? Will its greeting
be courteous or bluff?

Will it alter my life altogether?

O tell me the truth about love!

Johnny

O the valley in the summer when I and my John
Beside the deep river walk on and on
While the grass at our feet and the birds up above
Whispered so soft in reciprocal love,
And I leaned on his shoulder, 'O Johnny, let's play';
But he frowned like thunder, and he went away.

O the evening near Christmas as I well recall
When we went to the Charity Matinee Ball,
The floor was so smooth and the band was so loud
And Johnny so handsome I felt so proud;
'Squeeze me tighter, dear Johnny, let's dance till it's day';
But he frowned like thunder and went away.

Shall I ever forget at the Grand Opera
When music poured out of each wonderful star?
Diamonds and pearls hung like ivy down
Over each gold and silver gown;
'O Johnny I'm in heaven', I whispered to say:
But he frowned like thunder and went away.

O but he was as fair as a garden in flower,
As slender and tall as the great Eiffel Tower,
When the waltz throbbed out down the long promenade
O his eyes and his smile went straight to my heart;
'O marry me, Johnny, I'll love and obey';
But he frowned like thunder and he went away.

O last night I dreamed of you, Johnny, my lover;
You'd the sun on one arm and the moon on the other,
The sea it was blue and the grass it was green,
Ev'ry star rattled a round tambourine;
Ten thousand miles deep in a pit there I lay;
But you went away.

Funeral Blues

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead,
Tie crêpe bows round the white necks of the public
doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought my love would last for ever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one,
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun,
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the woods;
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

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