

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 6 November 2023
7.30pm

Apartment House

Brett Dean conductor

Kerry Yong piano

Emma Williams flute

Heather Roche clarinet

Christopher Redgate oboe

Robin Tritschler tenor

Philip Gibbon bassoon

Ben Goldscheider horn

Gordon Mackay violin

Bridget Carey viola

Anton Lukoszevieve cello

Paul Sherman double bass

Arthur Benjamin (1893-1960)

Elliott Carter (1908-2012)

Gerald Finzi (1901-1956)

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Peter Maxwell Davies (1934-2016)

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Hans Abrahamsen (b.1952)

Brett Dean (b.1961)

Hedgerow (1920)

Dust of Snow from *3 Poems of Robert Frost* (1943)

Song of Hiems from *4 Songs from Love's Labours Lost* Op. 28a (1946)

Winter Words Op. 52 (1953)

At day-close in November • Midnight on the Great Western • Wagtail and baby • The little old table • The Choirmaster's Burial • Proud songsters • At the railway station, Upway • Before life and after

Seven Skies of Winter Op. 238 (2003)

Interval

Fahrt zum Hades D526 (1817)

Die Krähe from *Winterreise* D911 (1827)

Nachtstück D672 (1819)

Der Tod und das Mädchen D531 (1817)

Nachthymne D687 (1820)

Canon 1a. Ruhig aber beweglich from *Schnee* (2008)

Winter Songs for tenor and wind quintet (1994-2000)

I. • II. • III.

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Living as I now do in rural England, I realise more strongly than ever before how much city life relativises the impact of winter, particularly in the denial of its encroaching darkness. Surrounded here by Wiltshire farmland and ancient monuments, the cycle of the seasons is felt palpably compared to my hitherto, mostly apartment-bound life in big, illuminated cities. As the daylight hours become shorter and temperatures drop, thoughts inevitably turn to things wintry and, as a consequence, often more inward.

Tonight's programme therefore pays homage to winter, for many people the most beautiful, contemplative and spiritual of the seasons, reflected through both text-based and purely instrumental music.

Both halves begin with a selection of songs for voice and piano, chosen and curated together with tonight's wonderful soloist, tenor Robin Tritschler.

The opening English-language bracket focusses on **Britten's** *Winter Words*, premièred at the Leeds Festival in October 1953, exactly 70 years ago, by Peter Pears together with the composer at the piano. In this cycle of Thomas Hardy poems, Britten displays an attraction to wintry reflection, even bleakness, in these masterful settings. This is perhaps best exemplified by 'The Chormaster's Burial', held amidst frosts 'greying the headstoned grass'.

Alongside Britten's 'late bird' in the opening song, winging across at a day's end in November, the preceding settings by **Gerald Finzi**, **Arthur Benjamin** and **Elliott Carter** also provide us with plenty of birdlife as metaphors by turns questioning and comforting. 'Sparrows shiver' and 'black rooks wheel homeward' in Arthur Benjamin's setting of William Sharp's *A winter hedgerow*. The staring owl sings nightly in Finzi's setting of Shakespeare while Carter's setting of Robert Frost features a crow shaking down a dust of snow.

The crow appears again in the bracket of **Schubert** songs that opens the second half of tonight's

programme, in the doom-laden form of Wilhelm Müller's 'Die Krähe' from *Winterreise* ('Do you intend to seize my body as prey?'). Tritschler's Schubert choices here reflect German Romantic poetry's frequent use of winter and darkness as metaphors for ageing and death. In 'Fahrt zum Hades', 'neither sun nor stars shine' while in 'Nachtstück' many a sweet bird calls for a good old man, 'Let him rest in his grassy grave'. Tritschler sees this bracket as a 'brief recap of *Winterreise*, but with a slightly happier ending.' As the final song of this selection, 'Nachthymne' offers some poignant solace: 'I shall pass over, and all pain will be a stab of pleasure'.

Solace comes also at the very end of my own *Winter Songs*, a setting from 2000 for tenor and wind quintet of poems by EE Cummings, which closes the concert. Following vivid descriptions of the 'eggyellow smear of wintry sunset' and city streets displaying 'twirls of dogshit' and 'much filthy slush', in the final movement of my cycle, Cummings as a child recalls the gold of a November sunset 'and feeling that if day has to become night, this is a beautiful way.'

Instrumental music serves as more than mere interludes this evening, presented jointly with prominent UK new music ensemble Apartment House. Closing the first half, **Peter Maxwell Davies's** *Seven Skies of Winter* is a virtuosic and evocatively intricate 20-minute ensemble work written for the Nash Ensemble and dedicated to the memory of the Stromness painter Ian MacInnes 'who captured so wonderfully Orkney's landscapes and its amazingly active skies', as the composer wrote prior to the work's 2004 première at the St Magnus Festival.

And in the middle of the second half, the opening *Canon* from **Hans Abrahamsen's** *Schnee*, scored for strings and piano, presents magical and translucent sounds of a remarkable delicacy and weightlessness, like snowflakes...

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Arthur Benjamin (1893-1960)

Hedgerow (1920)

William Sharp

The wintry wolds are white; the wind
Seems frozen; in the shelter'd nooks
The sparrows shiver; the black rooks
Wheel homeward where the elms behind
The manor stand; at the field's edge
The redbreasts in the blackthorn hedge
Sit close and under snowy eaves
The shrewmice sleep 'mid nested leaves.

Elliott Carter (1908-2012)

Dust of Snow from 3 Poems of Robert Frost

(1943)

Robert Frost

The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree

Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued.

Gerald Finzi (1901-1956)

Song of Hiems from 4 Songs from Love's Labours Lost Op. 28a (1946)

William Shakespeare

When icicles hang by the wall
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,
And Tom bears logs into the hall
And milk comes frozen home in pail,
When blood is nipped and ways be foul,
Then nightly sings the staring owl,
Tu-who; tu-whit; tu-who: a merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

When all aloud the wind doth blow
And coughing drowns the parson's saw,
And birds sit brooding in the snow
And Marian's nose looks red and raw,
When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl,
Then nightly sings the staring owl,
Tu-who; tu-whit; tu-who: a merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Winter Words Op. 52 (1953)

Thomas Hardy

At day-close in November

The ten hours' light is abating,
And a late bird wings across,
Where the pines, like waltzers waiting,
Give their black heads a toss.

Beech leaves, that yellow the noontime,
Float past like specks in the eye;
I set every tree in my June time,
And now they obscure the sky.

And the children who ramble through here
Conceive that there never has been
A time when no tall trees grew here,
That none will in time be seen.

Midnight on the Great Western

In the third-class seat sat the journeying boy,
And the roof-lamp's oily flame
Played down on his listless form and face,
Bewrapt past knowing to what he was going,
Or whence he came.

In the band of his hat the journeying boy
Had a ticket stuck; and a string
Around his neck bore the key of his box,
That twinkled gleams of the lamp's sad beams
Like a living thing.

What past can be yours, O journeying boy
Towards a world unknown,
Who calmly, as if incurious quite
On all at stake, can undertake
This plunge alone?

Knows your soul a sphere, O journeying boy,
Our rude realms far above,
Whence with spacious vision you mark and mete
This region of sin that you find you in,
But are not of?

Wagtail and baby

A baby watched a ford, whereto
A wagtail came for drinking;
A blaring bull went wading through,
The wagtail showed no shrinking.

A stallion splashed his way across,
The birdie nearly sinking;
He gave his plumes a twitch and toss,
And held his own unblinking.

Next saw the baby round the spot
A mongrel slowly slinking;
The wagtail gazed, but faltered not
In dip and sip and prinking.

A perfect gentleman then neared;
The wagtail, in a winking,
With terror rose and disappeared;
The baby fell a thinking.

The little old table

Creak, little wood thing, creak,
When I touch you with elbow or knee;
That is the way you speak
Of one who gave you to me!

You, little table, she brought –
Brought me with her own hand,
As she looked at me with a thought
That I did not understand.

Whoever owns it anon,
And hears it, will never know
What a history hangs upon
This creak from long ago.

The Choirmaster's Burial

He often would ask us
That, when he died,
After playing so many
To their last rest,
If out of us any
Should here abide,
And it would not task us,
We would with our lutes
Play over him
By his grave brim
The psalm he liked best –
The one whose sense suits –
'Mount Ephraim' –
And perhaps we should seem
To him, in Death's dream,
Like the seraphim.

As soon as I knew
That his spirit was gone
I thought this his due,
And spoke thereupon.
'I think', said the vicar,
'A read service quicker
Than viols out of doors
In these frosts and hoars.
That old fashioned way
Requires a fine day,
And it seems to me
It had better not be.'

Hence, that afternoon,
Though never knew he
That his wish could not be,
To get through it faster
They buried the master
Without any tune.

But 'twas said that, when
At the dead of next night
The vicar looked out,
There struck on his ken
Thronged roundabout,
Where the frost was graying
The headstoned grass,
A band all in white
Like saints in church glass,
Singing and playing
The ancient stave
By the choirmaster's grave.

Such the tenor man told
When he had grown old.

Proud songsters

The thrushes sing as the sun is going,
And the finches whistle in ones and pairs,
And as it gets dark loud nightingales in bushes
Pipe, as they can when April wears,
As if all Time were theirs.

These are brand new birds of twelve months'
growing,
Which a year ago, or less than twain,
No finches were, nor nightingales, nor thrushes,
But only particles of grain,
And earth, and air, and rain.

At the railway station, Upway

'There is not much that I can do,
For I've no money that's quite my own!
Spoke up the pitying child –
A little boy with a violin
At the station before the train came in.
'But I can play my fiddle to you,
And a nice one 'tis, and good in tone!

The man in the handcuffs smiled;
The constable looked, and he smiled, too,
As the fiddle began to twang;
And the man in the handcuffs suddenly sang
With grimful glee:
'This life so free
Is the thing for me!

And the constable smiled, and said no word,
As if unconscious of what he heard;
And so they went on till the train came in –
The convict, and boy with the violin.

Before life and after

A time there was – as one may guess
And as, indeed, earth's testimonies tell –
Before the birth of consciousness,
When all went well.

None suffered sickness, love, or loss,
None knew regret, starved hope, or heart-burnings;
None cared whatever crash or cross
Brought wrack to things.

If something ceased, no tongue bewailed,
If something winced and waned, no heart was wrung;
If brightness dimmed, and dark prevailed,
No sense was stung.

But the disease of feeling germed,
And primal rightness took the tinct of wrong;
Ere nescience shall be reaffirmed
How long, how long?

Peter Maxwell Davies (1934-2016)

Seven Skies of Winter Op. 238 (2003)

Interval

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Fahrt zum Hades D526 Journey to Hades (1817)

Johann Baptist Mayrhofer

Der Nachen dröhnt, Cypressen flüstern – Horch, Geister reden schaurig drein; Bald werd' ich am Gestad', dem düstern, Weit von der schönen Erde sein.	The boat creaks, cypresses whisper hark, spirits utter their chilling cries; soon I shall reach the gloomy shore, far from the lovely world.
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Da leuchten Sonne nicht, noch Sterne, Da tönt kein Lied, da ist kein Freund. Empfang die letzte Träne, o Ferne! Die dieses müde Auge weint.	Neither sun nor stars shine there, no song is heard, no friend is found. O distant earth, accept this last tear shed by my weary eyes.
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Schon schau' ich die blassen Danaiden, Den fluchbeladnen Tantalus; Es murmelt todesschwangern Frieden, Vergessenheit, dein alter Fluss.	Already I see the pale Danaides, and curse-laden Tantalus; your ancient river, O Oblivion, murmurs of death- swollen peace.
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Vergessen nenn' ich zwiefach Sterben. Was ich mit höchster Kraft gewann, Verlieren – wieder es erwerben – Wann enden diese Qualen? Wann?	Oblivion to me is a double death. To lose that which needed all my strength to win, and to strive for it once more – when will these torments cease? When?
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**Die Krähe from
Winterreise D911 (1827)**
Wilhelm Müller

Eine Krähe war mit mir
Aus der Stadt gezogen,
Ist bis heute für und für
Um mein Haupt
geflogen.

Krähe, wunderliches Tier,
Willst mich nicht
verlassen?
Meinst wohl bald als Beute hier
Meinen Leib zu fassen?

Nun, es wird nicht weit mehr
gehn
An dem Wanderstabe.
Krähe, lass mich endlich sehn
Treue bis zum Grabe!

Nachtstück D672 (1819)
Johann Baptist Mayrhofer

Wenn über Berge sich der
Nebel breitet,
Und Luna mit Gewölken
kämpft,
So nimmt der Alte seine
Harfe, und schreitet,
Und singt waldeinwärts
gedämpft:

„Du heil'ge Nacht!
Bald ist's vollbracht.
Bald schlafe ich ihn
Den langen Schlummer,
Der mich erlöst
Von allem Kummer.“

Die grünen Bäume rauschen
dann,
Schlaf süß, du guter alter
Mann;
Die Gräser lispeln wankend
fort,
Wir decken seinen
Ruheort;
Und mancher liebe Vogel
ruft,
O lass ihn ruh'n in
Rasengruft!“ –

Der Alte horcht, der Alte
schweigt –
Der Tod hat sich zu ihm
geneigt.

The crow

One crow came with me
from the town,
and to this day
has steadily circled my
head.

O crow, strange creature,
do you not wish to leave
me?
Do you intend soon
to seize my body as prey?

Well, I've not much
further
to journey with my staff.
O crow, let me at last see
faithfulness unto death!

Nocturne

When mist spreads over
the mountains,
and Luna battles with the
clouds,
the old man takes up his
harp, and steps
into the forest, singing
softly:

'O holy night!
Soon it shall be done.
Soon I shall sleep
the long sleep,
that shall free me
from all affliction.'

Then the green trees will
rustle:
sleep well, good old
man;
the swaying grass will
whisper:
we will cover his resting-
place;
and many a sweet bird
will call:
O let him rest in his
grassy grave! –

The old man listens, the
old man is silent –
death has inclined
towards him.

**Der Tod und das
Mädchen D531 (1817)**
Matthias Claudius

Das Mädchen
Vorüber! Ach, vorüber!
Geh, wilder Knochenmann!
Ich bin noch jung, geh
Lieber!
Und rühre mich nicht an.

Der Tod
Gib deine Hand, du schön
und zart Gebild!
Bin Freund, und komme
nicht, zu strafen.
Sei gutes Muts! Ich bin nicht
wild,
Sollst sanft in meinen Armen
schlafen!

**Nachthymne D687
(1820)**
Novalis

Hinüber wall' ich,
Und jede Pein
Wird einst ein Stachel
Der Wollust sein.
Noch wenig Zeiten,
So bin ich los,
Und liege trunken
Der Lieb' im Schoss.
Unendliches Leben
Wogt mächtig in mir;

Ich schaue von oben
Herunter nach dir,
An jenem Hügel
Verlischt dein Glanz,
Ein Schatten bringet
Den kühlenden Kranz.
O sauge, Geliebter,
Gewaltig mich an,
Das ich entschlummern
Und lieben kann!
Ich fühle des Todes
Verjüngende Flut,
Zu Balsam und Äther
Verwandelt mein Blut –
Ich lebe bei Tage
Voll Glauben und Mut,
Und sterbe die Nächte
In heiliger Glut.

**Death and the
Maiden**

The maiden
Away! Ah, away!
Away, fierce man of bones!
I am still young, go,
please go!
And do not touch me.

Death
Give me your hand, you
lovely, tender creature!
I am a friend, and do not
come to punish.
Be not afraid! I am not
fierce,
you shall sleep softly in
my arms!

Hymn to the night

I shall pass over,
and all pain
will be a stab
of pleasure.
In a short while
I shall be freed
and lie enraptured
in the bosom of love.
Eternal life
will surge powerfully
within me,
I shall gaze down on you
from above.
Your radiance will fade
on yonder hill,
shadow will bring
a cooling wreath.
Beloved, draw me
powerfully in,
that I may fall asleep
and love.
I feel the rejuvenating
tide of death,
my blood is changed
to balm and ether.
By day I live
full of faith and courage;
at night I die
in the sacred fire.

Hans Abrahamsen (b.1952)

Canon 1a. Ruhig aber beweglich from *Schnee*
(2008)

Brett Dean (b.1961)

Winter Songs for tenor and wind quintet

(1994-2000)
EE Cummings

I.

Poem 16 ('e')

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Poem 17 ('n')

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II.

Poem 36

if in beginning twilight of winter will stand

(over a snowstopped silent world) one
spirit serenely truly himself; and

alone only as greatness is alone

one (above nevermoving all nowhere)
goldenly whole, prodigiously alive
most mercifully glorying keen star

whom she-and-he-like ifs of am perceive

(but believe scarcely may) certainly while
mute each inch of their murdered planet grows
more and enormously more less:until
her-and-his nonexistence vanishes

with also earth's
'dying' the ghost of you
whispers 'is very pleasant' my ghost to

III.

Poem 52

who are you, little i

(five or six years old)
peering from some high

window;at the gold

of november sunset

(and feelin:that if day
has to become night

this is a beautiful way)

Poem 42 ('n')

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