

WIGMORE HALL 125

Saturday 8 November 2025
7.30pm

Rebecca Clarke Day

Concert IV: Celebrating 100 years since Rebecca Clarke's
sold-out recital at Wigmore Hall in 1925

Ailish Tynan soprano
Kitty Whately mezzo-soprano
Nicholas Phan tenor
Ashley Riches bass-baritone
Max Baillie violin, viola
Anna Tilbrook piano

Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979)

Greeting (1927)
Shy One (c.1912)
Up-Hill (?1907)
The cherry-blossom wand (1927)
God Made a Tree (1954)

Return of Spring (c.1910) *world première*
The Colour of life (c.1909) *world première*
Tears (1910) *world première*

Away, Delights (c.1912-3)
Sleep (1926)

Viola Sonata (1919)
I. Impetuoso • II. Vivace • III. Adagio

Interval

Durch die Nacht (1906)
Stimme im Dunkeln (c.1904)
Aufblick (1904)
Das Ideal (c.1907)

3 Irish Country Songs (1926)
*I know my love • I know where I'm goin' •
As I was goin' to Ballynure*

Down by the Salley Gardens (1919, arr. 1955)
Oh, Dreaming World (1905)
The Aspidistra (1929)

June Twilight (1925)
The Seal Man for voice, viola and piano (1922) *arranged by Myra
Lin, Max Baillie & Anna Tilbrook world première of arrangement*

Hymn to Pan (c.1912-3)



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The 1919 Viola Sonata, around which tonight's programme hinges, was the piece that rocketed Rebecca Clarke to fame as a composer. A formidable professional violist herself, she penned this piece for a composition competition, for which all entries had to be submitted anonymously. The jury placed her joint first, so the competition's organiser was given the casting vote for the winner. She ultimately gave the top spot to Ernest Bloch, but Clarke's second place announced her as a compositional force to be reckoned with. It was her first major work to be heard publicly. After its première the *New York Times* judged that she 'had unquestionably something of her own to say, she is moved by a strong feeling for beauty, and much of her work is charming and really engrossing.' Publication followed shortly, and the Sonata remains a staple of the viola repertoire.

In three movements, the Sonata combines all the compositional fingerprints that we hear individually in Clarke's songs. Above all, the Sonata is a theatrical work, written with the performer in mind. The opening movement, marked *Impetuoso*, opens with a short viola cadenza. It allows the performer to show their personality immediately – every player delivers these rhapsodic bars slightly differently. *The Seal Man* (1922) is comparably dramatic. It is like an opera condensed into six minutes, telling the story of a young woman who drowns following her lover into the sea. It is an intensely physical piece, and its effectiveness in performance lies heavily on intimacy and trust between the performers. Clarke once wrote that 'the dividing line between music and sex is so tenuous as to be almost nonexistent.' No song demonstrates this better than *The Seal Man*.

Orientalism is also a distinctive aspect of the Sonata's sound. All her life Clarke was fascinated by Asia, and would give an extended performance tour across Sri Lanka, India, Singapore, Malaysia, Myanmar, China and Japan in 1923. Her interest in Chinoiserie in particular comes through in her early songs to Chinese texts, *Return of Spring*, *The Colour of Life* and *Tears*, written between 1909 and 1910. These were the first songs in which Clarke really seemed to find her compositional voice. Even though *Tears* is only 90 seconds long it is particularly evocative, Clarke setting the images of moonlight and the weeping singer to a piano accompaniment that is so sparse it seems to simply hang in mid-air.

Down by the Salley Gardens (1919) has a similarly elusive quality. Written at the same time as the Viola Sonata while she was performing in Hawaii, her setting of WB Yeats's poem pairs a folk-like melody with a simple accompaniment that makes the piano sound a little like a plucked instrument, perhaps evoking the Chinese music she heard on the island. As with her 3 *Irish Country Songs* of 1926, Clarke moves far from the more romantic sound of Vaughan Williams's folk song

settings, pointing forwards instead towards Britten's settings of the 1940s.

Nonetheless, that Clarke came from the same milieu as Vaughan Williams is audible in the harmonies of the Sonata's third movement, and in songs like *June Twilight* (1925) and *The cherry-blossom wand* (1927). She was studying at the Royal College of Music while Vaughan Williams was teaching there, and he conducted the Palestrina choir that Clarke set up with a fellow student who would become her sister-in-law, Beryl Reeves. Ravel is an audible influence behind both Vaughan Williams and Clarke, particularly in the Sonata's second movement, marked *Vivace*.

Underlying Clarke's French-inflected textures and Orientalist sound in the Sonata, however, is a deep engagement with classical forms and structures. She grew up rooted in the Austro-German canon, and as a chamber performer she performed Brahms, Beethoven, Haydn and Mozart extensively. Her earliest songs, such as *Aufblick* (1904), *Stimme im Dunkeln* (c.1904), *Durch die Nacht* (1906) and *Das Ideal* (c.1907), closely followed pre-existing models in the late-Romantic, German style. When she then went to the College as a composition student, she was further steeped in the classics. Her tutor, Charles Villiers Stanford, used Beethoven, Schumann, Mozart and Bach as his models, and encouraged all his students to have a thorough grasp of their techniques before moving away from them. This solid foundation is evident in the first and third movements of the Sonata, which play with the expectations of classical sonata form.

Clarke was very serious about her career, but as a person she had a wicked sense of humour, which comes through in *The Aspidistra* (1929). Setting a poem by Claude Flight, it relates the merciless murder of the seemingly indestructible, shade-loving houseplant that could be found in almost any Victorian middle-class home. 'Twas old and green and dusty, A living, lingering blot', the singer says: so 'I took away its curtains And the aspidistra died.' The *Manchester Guardian* felt that Clarke's setting 'improves on a merely comic poem by music that is truly satirical', and Clarke reported that at its first performance 'everybody laughed so much the end was inaudible.'

Clarke's range as a composer was enormous. From the effusive freedom of her first published song *Shy One* (c.1912), to the enigmatic reservation of her final song *God Made A Tree* (1954), her works offer a wealth of emotional and dramatic riches for performers and listeners alike. With events like this focus day drawing attention to her compositions, and her complete songs having now been recorded, Clarke is well on her way to holding the place she deserves at the heart of 20th-century British music.

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Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979)

Greeting (1927)

Ella Young

Over the wave-patterned sea-floor
Over the long sunburnt ridge of the world,
I bid the winds seek you.
I bid them cry to you
Night and morning
A name you loved once;
I bid them bring to you
Dreams, and strange imaginings, and sleep.

Shy One (c.1912)

William Butler Yeats

Shy one, shy one,
Shy one of my heart,
She moves in the firelight
Pensively apart.

She carries in the dishes,
And lays them in a row.
To an isle in the water
With her would I go.

She carries in the candles,
And lights the curtained room,
Shy in the doorway
And shy in the gloom;

And shy as a rabbit,
Helpful and shy.
To an isle in the water,
With her I would fly.

Up-Hill (?1907)

Christina Rossetti

‘Does the road wind up-hill all the way?’
‘Yes, to the very end.’
‘Will the day’s journey take the whole long day?’
‘From morn to night, my friend.’

‘But is there for the night a resting-place?’
‘A roof for when the slow dark hours begin.’
‘May not the darkness hide it from my face?’
‘You cannot miss that inn.’

‘Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?’
‘Those who have gone before.’
‘Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?’
‘They will not keep you standing at that door.’

‘Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?’
‘Of labour you shall find the sum.’
‘Will there be beds for me and all who seek?’
‘Yea, beds for all who come.’

The cherry-blossom wand (1927)

Anna Wickham

I will pluck from my tree a cherry-blossom wand,
And carry it in my merciless hand,
So I will drive you, so bewitch your eyes,
With a beautiful thing that can never grow wise.

Light are the petals that fall from the bough,
And lighter the love that I offer you now;
In a spring day shall the tale be told
Of the beautiful things that will never grow old.

The blossoms shall fall in the night wind
And I will leave you so, to be kind:
Eternal in beauty, are short-lived flowers,
Eternal in beauty, these exquisite hours.

I will pluck from my tree a cherry-blossom wand,
And carry it in my merciless hand,
So I will drive you, so bewitch your eyes,
With a beautiful thing that can never grow wise.

God Made a Tree (1954)

Katherine Kendall

God made a tree.
Man felled it and with craft and cunning fashioned it
crosswise.
God hung on it.

God made a rose.
Man plucked it and with crooked skill twisted its thorns
crownwise.
God wore it.

God made a stone.
Man hewed it and sealed Him in a tomb with it gravewise.
God rose from it.

Return of Spring (c.1910)

Ssü-K'ung T'u

A lovely maiden, roaming
The wild dark valley through,
Culls from the shining waters
Lilies and lotus blue.
With leaves the peach-trees are laden,
The wind sighs through the haze,
And the willows wave their shadows
Down the oriole-haunted ways.
As, passion-tranced, I follow,
I hear the old refrain
Of Spring's eternal story,
That was old and is young again.

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

The Colour of life (c.1909)

Ssü-K'ung T'u

Would that we might for ever stay
The rainbow glories of the world,
The blue of the unfathomed sea,
The rare azalea late unfurled,
The parrot of a greener spring,
The willows and the terrace line,
The stranger from the night-steeped hills,
The roselit brimming cup of wine.
Oh for a life that stretched afar,
Where no dead dust of books were rife,
Where spring sang clear from star to star;
Alas! what hope for such a life?

Tears (1910)

Wang Seng-Ju

High o'er the hill the moon barque steers.
The lantern lights depart.
Dead springs are stirring in my heart;
And there are tears ...
[And] that which makes my grief more deep
Is that you know not when I weep.

Away Delights (c.1912-3)

John Fletcher

Away, delights! go seek some other dwelling,
For I must die.
Farewell, false love! thy tongue is ever telling
Lie after lie.
For ever let me rest now from thy smarts;
Alas, for pity go
And fire their hearts
That have been hard to thee! Mine was not so.

Never again deluding love shall know me,
For I will die;
And all those griefs that think to overgrow me
Shall be as I:
For ever will I sleep, while poor maids cry—
'Alas, for pity stay,
And let us die
With thee! Men cannot mock us in the clay.'

Sleep (1926)

John Fletcher

Come, Sleep, and with thy sweet deceiving
Lock me in delight awhile;
Let some pleasing dreams beguile
All my fancies; that from thence
I may feel an influence
All my powers of care bereaving!

Though but a shadow, but a sliding,
Let me know some little joy!
We that suffer long annoy
Are contented with a thought
[By] an idle fancy wrought:
O let my joys have some abiding!

Viola Sonata (1919)

I. Impetuoso

II. Vivace

III. Adagio

Interval

Durch die Nacht (1906)

Richard Dehmel

Und immer Du, dies dunkle
Du,
Und durch die Nacht dies
hohle Sausen;
Die Telegraphendrähte
brausen,
Ich schreite meiner Heimat
zu.

Und Schritt für Schritt dies
dunkle Du,
Es scheint von Pol zu Pol zu
sausen;
Und tausend [Wörter] hör
ich [brausen, ich]
Schreite stumm der Heimat
zu.

Through the night

And ever you, this
darkling you,
and through the night this
hollow humming;
the telegraph wires
roaring,
I march towards my
homeland.

And step by step this
darkling you,
as if it hummed from pole
to pole;
and I hear the roaring of a
thousand words
and march towards my
homeland, mute.

Stimme im Dunkeln

(c.1904)

Richard Dehmel

Es klagt im Dunkeln
irgendwo.
Ich möchte wissen, was es
ist.
Der Wind klagt wohl die
Nacht an.

Der Wind klagt aber nicht so
nah.
Der Wind klagt immer in der
Nacht.
In meinen Ohren klagt mein
Blut,
Mein Blut wohl.

Mein Blut klagt aber nicht so
fremd.
Mein Blut ist ruhig wie die
Nacht.
Ich glaub, ein Herz klagt
irgendwo.

Aufblick (1904)

Richard Dehmel

Über unsre Liebe hängt
Eine tiefe Trauerweide.
Nacht und Schatten um uns
beide.
Unsre Stirnen sind gesenkt.

Wortlos sitzen wir im
Dunkeln.
Einstmals rauschte hier ein
Strom,
Einstmals sahn wir Sterne
funkeln.

Ist denn Alles tot und
trübe?
Horch —: ein ferner Mund —
vom Dom —:

Glockenchöre... Nacht ... und
Liebe...

A voice in the dark

Something, somewhere,
cries in the dark.
I would like to know what
it is.
The wind wails through
the night.

But the wind doesn't
sound so near.
The wind is always wailing
in the night.
In my ears my blood
keens,
my very blood.

But my blood doesn't
sound so strange.
My blood is calm as the
night.
I think somewhere a heart is
making that sound.

Gazing up

Above our love hangs
a deep weeping willow.
Night and shadow
envelop us.
Our brows are lowered.

Wordless we sit in the
dark.
Once a river roared
here,
once we saw stars
sparkle.

Is everything, then, dead
and dismal?
Listen – a distant voice –
from the cathedral –

Choirs of bells... night...
and love.

Das Ideal (c.1907)

Richard Dehmel

[Drum] hab ich meine
Sehnsucht stets gebüsst;
Ich ging nach Liebe aus auf
allen Wegen,
Auf allen kam die Liebe mir
entgegen,
[Doch] hab ich meine
Sehnsucht stets gebüsst ...

Es stand ein Baum in einem
Zaubergarten,
[Von] tausend Blüten
[duftete sein Bild],

[Und] eine leuchtete vor
allen [mild];
Es stand ein Baum in einem
Zaubergarten.

Und aus den tausend
pflückte ich die
eine,
Sie war noch schöner mir in
meinen Händen,
[Sodass ich] kniete, Dank
dem Baum zu spenden,
Von dem aus tausend
ich gepflückt die
eine.

Ich hob die Augen zu dem
Zauberbaume,
Und wieder schien vor allen
eine Licht,

Und meine welkte schon —
ich dankte nicht;
Ich hob die Augen zu dem
Zauberbaume ...

Doch hab ich meine
Sehnsucht nie verlernt;
Ich ging nach Liebe aus auf
allen Wegen,
Auf jedem [reifte] mir ein
andrer Segen,
Drum hab ich meine
Sehnsucht nie verlernt.

The ideal

Thus, I have always paid
for my desire,
I've looked for love on
every path I've trod,
on every path I've trod
love came to meet me,
still, I have always paid for
my desire ...

There was a tree in a
magician's garden,
a thousand blossoms
ringed its crown with
scent,
but one shone with a gentle
light more brightly;
there was a tree in a
magician's garden.

And from those thousand
blossoms I plucked that
one,
it shone more brightly still
upon my hands;
but I fell to my knees, to
thank the tree
from which I had, from all
those thousand,
plucked that one.

I lifted up my eyes to the
magician's tree
and once again one
blossom shone more
bright,
and mine already wilting
— I gave no thanks;
I lifted up my eyes to the
magician's tree ...

Still, I have never given up
desiring;
I've sought for love on
every path I've trod,
on every path another
blessing lured me,
and thus I've never
ceased in my desire.

3 Irish Country Songs (1926)

Traditional

I know my love

I know my love by his way of walkin'
And I know my love by his way of talkin'
And I know my love drest in a suit o' blue,
And if my love leaves me what will I do?
And still she cried 'I love him the best,
And a troubled mind, sure, can know no rest.'
And still she cried 'Bonny boys are few,
And if my love leaves me what will I do?

'There is a dance house in Maradyke
And there my true love goes ev'ry night,
He takes a strange one upon his knee,
and don't you think now that vexes me?'
And still she cried 'I love him the best,
And a troubled mind, sure, can know no rest.'
And still she cried 'Bonny boys are few,
And if my love leaves me what will I do?

'If my love knew I could wash and wring,
If my love knew I could weave and spin,
I'd make a coat all of the finest kind,
but the want of money sure, leaves me behind.'
And still she cried 'I love him the best,
And a troubled mind, sure, can know no rest.'
And still she cried 'Bonny boys are few,
And if my love leaves me what will I do?

I know where I'm goin'

I know where I'm goin'
And I know who's goin' with me
I know who I love
But the dear knows who I'll marry.

I have stockings of silk,
Shoes of fine green leather
Combs to buckle my hair
And a ring for every finger.

Some say he's black,
But I say he's bonny,
The fairest of them all,
My handsome, winsome Johnny.

Feather beds are soft
And painted rooms are bonny,
But I would leave them all,
To go with my love Johnny.

As I was goin' to Ballynure

As I was goin' to Ballynure,
A day I will remember,
For to view the lads and lasses
On the fifth day of November.

*With a' ma-ring-doo-a-day,
Oh, ma-ring-doo-a-daddy-oh.*

As I was goin' along the road
[As] homeward I was walking,
I heard a wee lad behind a ditch-a
To his wee lass was [talking], ...

Said the wee lad to the wee lass
'It's will ye let me kiss ye?
For it's I have the cordial eye
That far exceeds the whiskey!' ...

'This cordial that ye talk about
There's very few o' them gets it,
For there's nothin' now but crooked combs
And muslin gowns can catch it!' ...

As I was goin' along the road ...

Down by the Salley Gardens (1919, arr. 1955)

William Butler Yeats

Down by the salley gardens my love and I did meet;
She passed the salley gardens with little snow-white feet.
She bid me take love easy as the leaves grow on the tree;
But I, being young and foolish, with her would not agree.

In a field by the river my love and I did stand,
And on my leaning shoulder she laid her snow-white
hand.
She bid me take life easy as the grass grows on the weirs;
But I was young and foolish, and now am full of tears.

Oh, Dreaming World (1905)

Katharine Coolidge

Oh, dreaming world, thou floatest light and free
As summer clouds soft cradled in the sky;
Held to thy mother-breast I dream with thee,
Nor would awake, lest waking I should die:
Yet Death will waken thee for thy dreams' sake;
And if thy dreams are so entrancing sweet,
What vision waits thee when thou shalt awake
To unknown Life, when Death and dreaming meet!
Oh, light-winged world, I dream with thee to-day;
Suffer me thus a passing while to share
Thy golden dower, and dream myself away;
Life in thine arms is so impassioned [sweet]!
Enfold me with the magic of thy breath,
Until I wake beyond thy dream of Death.

The Aspidistra (1929)

Claude Flight

I had an aspidistra
'Twas growing in a pot.
'Twas old and green and dusty,
A living, lingering blot.
I took away its curtains
Because I loved them not.

I took away its curtains
Of lace with velvet tied.
I took away its curtains
Which were the creature's pride.
I took away its curtains
And the aspidistra died.

June Twilight (1925)

John Masefield

The twilight comes;
The sun dips down and sets,
The boys have done
Play at the nets.

In a warm golden glow
The woods are steeped.
The shadows grow;
The bat has cheeped.

Sweet smells the new-mown hay;
The mowers pass
Home, each his way,
through the grass.

The night-wind stirs the fern,
A night-jar spins;
The windows burn
In the inns.

Dusky it grows. The moon! The dew's descend.
Love, can this beauty in our hearts end?

The Seal Man for voice, viola and piano (1922)

John Masefield

arranged by Myra Lin, Max Baillie & Anna Tilbrook

And he came by her cabin to the west of the road, calling.
There was a strong love came up in her at that,
And she put down her sewing on the table, and 'Mother,'
she says,
'There's no lock, and no key, and no bolt, and no door.
There's no iron, nor no stone, nor anything at all
Will keep me this night from the man I love.'
And she went out into the moonlight to him,
There by the bush where the flow'rs is pretty, beyond the
river.
And he says to her: 'You are all of the beauty of the world,

Will you come where I go, over the waves of the sea?'
And she says to him: 'My treasure and my strength,' she
says,
'I would follow you on the frozen hills, my feet bleeding.'
Then they went down into the sea together,
And the moon made a track on the sea, and they walked
down it;
It was like a flame before them. There was no fear at all on
her;
Only a great love like the love of the Old Ones,
That was stronger than the touch of the fool.
She had a little white throat, and little cheeks like flowers,
And she went down into the sea with her man,
Who wasn't a man at all.
She was drowned, of course.
It's like he never thought that she wouldn't bear the sea
like himself.
She was drowned, drowned.

Hymn to Pan (c.1912-3)

John Fletcher

Sing his praises that doth keep
Our flocks from harm,
Pan, the father of our sheep;
And arm in arm
Tread we softly in a round,
Whilst the hollow neighbouring ground
Fills the music with [its] sound.

Pan, O great god Pan, to thee
Thus do we sing!
Thou who keep'st us chaste and free
As the young spring:
Ever be thy honour spoke
From that place the morn is broke
To that place day doth unyoke!

Text of Greeting by Ella Young, printed in consultation with the Ella Young Society (EllaYoung.org). Oh Dreaming World (1905); Words by Katharine Coolidge (Voices, 1899); Early Songs, Volume 1, ed. Nicholas Phan and Christopher Johnson (ClarNan Editions, 2025); printed with permission. June Twilight and The Seal Man by John Masefield, printed by kind permission from The Society of Authors as the literary representative of the estate of John Masefield.

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Kitty Whately and Anna Tilbrook are delighted to announce that in January 2026, they will be working with the charity SWAP'ra to launch **The Rebecca Clarke Song Competition**, a new national competition celebrating Clarke and other British women composers of the past century. Singers and pianists are warmly encouraged to apply, and audiences will be invited to attend the public semi-final and final in central London. Applications close on 28 November. For more information please see swap-ra.org/rebecca-clarke-song-competition

For full information about Rebecca Clarke and her works, please see rebeccaclarkecomposer.com