

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 20 March 2022 3.00pm

Helen Charlston mezzo-soprano

Sholto Kynoch piano

Clara Schumann (1819-1896)

6 Lieder Op. 13 (1840-3)

*Ich stand in dunkeln Träumen • Sie liebten sich beide •
Liebeszauber • Der Mond kommt still gegangen •
Ich hab' in deinem Auge • Die stille Lotosblume*

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Ständchen Op. 106 No. 1 (c.1888)

Wie Melodien zieht es mir Op. 105 No. 1 (1886)

Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer Op. 105 No. 2 (1886-8)

Feldeinsamkeit Op. 86 No. 2 (c.1879)

Es steht ein Lind WoO. 33 No. 41 (by 1893-4)

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

How sweet the answer (1957)

Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979)

Down by the Salley Gardens (1919)

Andrew Brixey-Williams (b.1956)

Abat-jour (2020) *from Isolation Songbook, commissioned by Helen Charlston*

Gerald Finzi (1901-1956)

As I lay in the early sun from *Oh fair to see* Op. 13b (1921 rev. 1956)

Joshua Borin (b.1989)

Nature is Returning (2020) *from Isolation Songbook, commissioned by Helen Charlston*

Juliana Hall (b.1958)

To Mother from *Letters from Edna* (1993)

Nathan James Dearden (b.1992)

the way we go (2020) *from Isolation Songbook, commissioned by Helen Charlston*

Stephen Bick (b.1993)

On His Blindness (2020) *from Isolation Songbook, commissioned by Helen Charlston*

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The strict lockdowns of 2020 had dire professional consequences for musicians. For Helen Charlston, they took an especially personal toll too: her wedding had to be postponed. But during those grim days of the early pandemic, she decided to find a new way to connect with musicians. As she put it: 'I reached four poets and fifteen composers looking for that impetus to turn their creativity into something tangible'. The outcome was *Isolation Songbook*, a project from which we'll hear four songs tonight, alongside a range of songs composed as far back as the 19th Century.

Isolation Songbook is a product of a particular time, one that many of us will be keen to forget. But its songs are more than just a recent historical record. The themes they bring into focus are also perennial ones - among them loneliness, dreams of escape and a love of nature.

Of course, the history of classical song is steeped in the domestic sphere: lively soirées around the piano were taking place long before anyone attempted a recital over Zoom. But it's nonetheless remarkable how often song composers set poetry that yearns to wander outdoors.

During lockdown, many of us became more aware of nature around us, while finding respite from indoor tedium in our local green spaces. Similarly, for the German Romantics of the 19th Century, natural landscapes could be places of contemplation and solace - consider the iconic figure of Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, his back turned on us and the increasingly industrialised world.

Tonight's songs by **Clara Schumann** and **Brahms** are fine examples of Romantic eloquence with a domestic musicality - one which is intimate, and tends to avoid extremes. Schumann was one of the great pianists of her day, but her 6 Lieder Op. 13 have accompaniments that are shrewdly unobtrusive, mostly chordal in support of the vocal line. The Brahms songs cover a wider period, and show more interest in textural interplay, but they are similarly circumspect.

Both composers set poetry suffused with natural imagery. Schumann's lively 'Liebeszauber' praises love as a nightingale's song, while the faltering beauty of 'Die stille Lotosblume' evokes a moonlit lake. Brahms's 'Es steht ein Lind' reflects upon a tree, a bird and a fountain as reminders of heartbreak, and here we can see a parallel to 20th-century English song too. Grass and leaves recall lost love in **Rebecca Clarke**'s 'Down by the Salley Gardens', the pentatonic shapes of its melody showing the influence of folksong.

More specific poetic scenarios recur across the German-English divide. Brahms's 'Feldeinsamkeit' and **Finzi**'s 'As I lay in the early sun' both find us reclining in grass. While the Brahms

is a sort of spiritual cloud-watching, hushed and wistful, the passion of Finzi's lonely lover surges up through the wandering piano lines. Meanwhile, the enchantment of outdoor music at night inspires Brahms's 'Ständchen' and **Britten**'s 'How sweet the answer'. The former is brisk and light-hearted, but the latter flows gently, with a tinkling piano figure suggesting nocturnal echoes.

Of the entire *Isolation Songbook*, perhaps the work most rooted in the strangeness of the pandemic and its indoor/outdoor tensions is **Joshua Borin**'s 'Nature is Returning'. The ambling pace of the music reflects a life forced into sudden slowness, while the words by Sophie Rashbrook examine a widely-noted lockdown phenomenon, in which animals began to reclaim our newly-abandoned urban spaces. Rashbrook wittily sends up our divided feelings about this: her mesmerised awe at hearing an owl in a London park soon becomes snappy irritation when moths invade her house.

Contrastingly, two *Isolation Songbook* composers chose words that focus on ideas of restricted space. **Andrew Brixey-Williams**'s 'Abat-jour' describes the minute details of an interior scene with an uneasy stillness, its pauses and sparse piano part seeming to suggest sinister possibilities. Likewise, 'the way we go' by **Nathan James Dearden** plays on the idea of an empty house, but it builds in waves of intensity towards a vision of transcendental escape: 'seeing beauty in a flag of sky / we're gone'.

Domesticity is suggested too in **Juliana Hall**'s 1993 setting of American poet Edna St Vincent Millay. The source is that most personal writing: a letter from the poet to her mother. Hall sets the lines with naturalistic rhythms, characterising a relationship of easy familiarity, and the result is similar to something we might overhear from one side of a telephone conversation.

The final song in *Isolation Songbook* makes a fitting end to tonight's programme. **Stephen Bick**'s 'On His Blindness' rolls back the centuries to the words of John Milton - who knew all about plagues and distracted times - written when the poet was contemplating the loss of his sight. Bick takes his music back further still, by alluding to a bleakly beautiful tune by Thomas Tallis, best known today as the theme of Vaughan Williams's celebrated fantasia for strings. While Vaughan Williams showed us the timeless questioning power of this Tudor hymn, Bick shows the continued relevance of Milton's existential anxiety too. His concluding line, that patient waiting can be a kind of service, is surely one of the enduring lessons of the last two years.

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Clara Schumann (1819-1896)

6 Lieder Op. 13 (1840-3)

Ich stand in dunkeln Träumen

Heinrich Heine

Ich stand in dunkeln Träumen,
Und starrte ihr Bildnis an,
Und das geliebte Antlitz
Heimlich zu leben begann.

Um ihre Lippen zog sich
Ein Lächeln wunderbar,
Und wie von Wehmutstränen
Erglänzte ihr Augenpaar.

Auch meine Tränen flossen
Mir von den Wangen herab –
Und ach, ich kann es nicht glauben,
Dass ich dich verloren hab'!

Sie liebten sich beide

Heinrich Heine

Sie liebten sich beide, doch
keiner
Wollt' es dem andern gestehn;
Sie sahen sich an so
feindlich,
Und wollten vor Liebe vergehn.

Sie trennten sich endlich und
sah'n sich
Nur noch zuweilen im Traum;
Sie waren längst gestorben
Und wussten es selber kaum.

Liebeszauber

Emanuel von Geibel

Die Liebe sass als Nachtigall
Im Rosenbusch und sang;
Es flog der wunderschöne
Schall
Den grünen Wald entlang.

Und wie er klang, da stieg im
Kreis
Aus tausend Kelchen Duft,
Und alle Wipfel rauschten leis',
Und leiser ging die Luft;

I stood in dark dreams

I stood in dark dreams,
and gazed at her likeness,
and that beloved face
sprang mysteriously to life.

A wonderful smile played
about her lips,
and her eyes glistened,
as though with sad tears.

My tears too
streamed down my cheeks –
and ah, I cannot believe
I have lost you!

They loved one another

They loved one another, but
neither
wished to tell the other;
they gave each other such
hostile looks,
yet nearly died of love.

In the end they parted and
saw
each other but rarely in dreams.
They died so long ago
and hardly knew it themselves.

Love's magic

Love in the guise of a nightingale
sat in a rosebush and sang;
'twas a wonderful sweet sound
that soared
all about the green forest.

And with its echoes rose all
around
perfume from a thousand blossoms,
and every treetop rustled quietly
and the air moved more gently;

Die Bäche schwiegen, die noch
kaum
Geplätschert von den Höh'n,
Die Rehlein standen wie im Traum
Und lauschten dem Getön.

Und hell und immer heller floss
Der Sonne Glanz herein,
Um Blumen, Wald und Schlucht
ergoss
Sich goldig roter Schein.

Ich aber zog den Weg entlang
Und hörte auch den Schall.
Ach! was seit jener Stund' ich
sang,
War nur sein Widerhall.

Der Mond kommt still gegangen

Emanuel von Geibel

Der Mond kommt still gegangen
Mit seinem gold'nen Schein.
Da schläft in holdem Prangen
Die müde Erde ein.

Und auf den Lüften schwanken
Aus manchem treuen Sinn
Viel tausend Liebesgedanken
Über die Schläfer hin.

Und drunten im Tale, da funkeln
Die Fenster von Liebchens
Haus;
Ich aber blicke im Dunklen
Still in die Welt hinaus.

Ich hab' in deinem Auge

Friedrich Rückert

Ich hab' in deinem Auge
Den Strahl der ewigen Liebe
gesehen,
Ich sah auf deinen Wangen
Einmal die Rosen des Himmels
stehn.

Und wie der Strahl im Aug'
erlischt
Und wie die Rosen zerstieben,
Ihr Abglanz ewig neu erfrischt,
Ist mir im Herzen geblieben,

The brooks were silent, they
that had only just
been splashing from the heights,
as in a dream stood the deer
heeding every sound.

And bright and ever brighter flowed
the splendour of the sun,
flowers, woods and ravines
were bathed
in a glow of golden red.

I wended my way,
hearing the sounds as well.
Alas! The songs which I have
since sung
have been but their echo.

The moon rises silently

The moon rises silently
with its golden glow.
The weary earth then falls asleep
in beauty and splendour.

Many thousand loving thoughts
from many faithful minds
sway on the breezes
over those who slumber.

And down in the valley sparkle
the windows of my beloved's
house;
but I in the darkness gaze
silently out into the world.

I saw in your eyes

I saw in your eyes
the ray of eternal
love,
I saw on your cheeks
the roses of
heaven.

And as the ray dies in your
eyes,
and as the roses scatter,
their reflection, forever new,
has remained in my heart,

Und niemals werd' ich die
Wangen seh'n
Und nie in's Auge dir blicken,
So werden sie mir in Rosen steh'n
Und es den Strahl mir schicken.

And never will I look at your
cheeks,
and never will I gaze into your eyes,
and not see the glow of roses,
and the ray of love.

Die stille Lotosblume

The silent lotus flower

Emanuel von Geibel

Die stille Lotosblume
Steigt aus dem blauen See,
Die Blätter flimmern und blitzen,
Der Kelch ist weiss wie Schnee.

The silent lotus flower
rises out of the blue lake,
its leaves glitter and glow,
its cup is as white as snow.

Da giesst der Mond vom Himmel
All seinen gold'nen Schein,
Giesst alle seine Strahlen
In ihren Schoss hinein.

The moon then pours from heaven
all its golden light,
pours all its rays
into the lotus flower's bosom.

Im Wasser um die Blume
Kreiset ein weisser Schwan,
Er singt so süß, so leise
Und schaut die Blume an.

In the water, round the flower,
a white swan circles,
it sings so sweetly, so quietly,
and gazes on the flower.

Er singt so süß, so leise
Und will im Singen vergehn.
O Blume, weisse Blume,
Kannst du das Lied verstehn?

It sings so sweetly, so quietly,
and wishes to die as it sings.
O flower, white flower,
can you fathom the song?

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Ständchen Op. 106 No. 1 Serenade

(c.1888)

Franz Kugler

Der Mond steht über dem
Berge,
So recht für verliebte Leut;
Im Garten rieselt ein Brunnen,
Sonst Stille weit und breit.

The moon shines over the
mountain,
just right for people in love;
a fountain purls in the garden –
otherwise silence far and wide.

Neben der Mauer, im Schatten,
Da stehn der Studenten drei
Mit Flöt' und Geig' und Zither,
Und singen und spielen dabei.

By the wall in the shadows,
three students stand
with flute and fiddle and zither,
and sing and play.

Die Klänge schleichen der
Schönsten
Sacht in den Traum hinein,
Sie schaut den blonden Geliebten
Und lispelt: „Vergiss nicht mein.“

The sounds steal softly into the
dreams
of the loveliest of girls,
she sees her fair-headed lover
and whispers: 'Remember me.'

Wie Melodien zieht es

Op. 105 No. 1 (1886)

Klaus Groth

Wie Melodien zieht es
Mir leise durch den Sinn,
Wie Frühlingsblumen blüht es
Und schwebt wie Duft dahin.

Thoughts, like melodies

Thoughts, like melodies,
steal softly through my mind,
like spring flowers they blossom
and drift away like fragrance.

Doch kommt das Wort und fasst
es
Und führt es vor das Aug',
Wie Nebelgrau erblasst es
Und schwindet wie ein Hauch.

Yet when words come and
capture them
and bring them before my eyes,
they turn pale like grey mist
and vanish like a breath.

Und dennoch ruht im Reime
Verborgen wohl ein Duft,
Den mild aus stillem Keime
Ein feuchtes Auge ruft.

Yet surely in rhyme
a fragrance lies hidden,
summoned by moist eyes
from the silent seed.

Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer Op. 105

No. 2 (1886-8)

Hermann Lingg

Immer leiser wird mein
Schlummer,
Nur wie Schleier liegt mein
Kummer
Zitternd über mir.
Oft im Traume hör' ich dich
Rufen draus vor meiner Tür,
Niemand wacht und öffnet dir,
Ich erwach' und weine bitterlich.

My sleep grows ever quieter

My sleep grows ever
quieter,
only my grief, like a veil,
lies
trembling over me.
I often hear you in my dreams
calling outside my door,
no one keeps watch and lets you in,
I awake and weep bitterly.

Ja, ich werde sterben müssen,
Eine andre wirst du küssen,
Wenn ich bleich und kalt.
Eh die Maienlüfte wehn,
Eh die Drossel singt im Wald;
Willst du mich noch einmal sehn,
Komm, o komme bald!

Yes, I shall have to die,
you will kiss another
when I am pale and cold.
Before May breezes blow,
before the thrush sings in the wood;
if you would see me once again,
come soon, come soon!

Feldeinsamkeit Op. 86

No. 2 (c.1879)

Hermann Allmers

Ich ruhe still im hohen grünen
Gras
Und sende lange meinen Blick
nach oben,
Von Grillen rings umschwirrt
ohn' Unterlass,

Alone in fields

I rest at peace in tall green
grass
and gaze steadily
aloft,
surrounded by unceasing
crickets,

Von Himmelsbläue wundersam
umwoben. wondrously interwoven with
blue sky.

Die schönen weissen Wolken
ziehn dahin The lovely white clouds go
drifting by
Durchs tiefe Blau, wie schöne
stille Träume; – through the deep blue, like
lovely silent dreams;
Mir ist, als ob ich längst
gestorben bin, I feel as if I have long been
dead,
Und ziehe selig mit durch ew'ge
Räume. drifting happily with them
through eternal space.

Es steht ein Lind WoO. **A lime tree stands**
33 No. 41 (by 1893-4)
Traditional

Es steht ein Lind in jenem Tal, A lime tree stands in that valley,
Ach Gott, was tut sie da? ah, God, what is it doing there?
Sie will mir helfen trauren,
trauren, It will help me to mourn, to
mourn
Dass ich mein' Lieb' verloren hab', that I have lost my love,
Dass ich mein' Lieb' verloren hab'. that I have lost my love,

Es sitzt ein Vöglein auf dem Zaun, A little bird sits on the fence,
Ach Gott, was tut es da? ah, God, what is it doing there?
Es will mir helfen klagen,
klagen, It will help me to grieve, to
grieve
Dass ich mein' Lieb' verloren hab'. that I have lost my love,
Dass ich mein' Lieb' verloren hab'. that I have lost my love,

Es quillt ein Brunnlein auf dem
Plan, A little stream flows over the
plain,
Ach Gott, was tut es da? ah, God, what is it doing there?
Es will mir helfen weinen, weinen, It will help me to weep, to weep
Dass ich mein' Lieb' verloren hab'. that I have lost my love,
Dass ich mein' Lieb' verloren hab'. that I have lost my love,

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

How sweet the answer (1957)
Thomas Moore

How sweet the answer Echo makes
To Music at night,
When, rous'd by lute or horn, she wakes,
And far away, o'er lawns and lakes,
Goes answering light.

Yet love hath echoes truer far,
And far more sweet,
Than e'er beneath the moonlight's star,
Of horn, or lute, or soft guitar,
The songs repeat.

'Tis when the sigh, in youth sincere,
And only then -
The sigh, that's breath'd for one to hear,
Is by that one, that only dear,
Breath'd back again.

Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979)

Down by the Salley Gardens (1919)
WB 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.

Andrew Brixey-Williams (b.1956)

Abat-jour (2020)

from *Isolation Songbook*, commissioned by Helen Charlston
Pierre Reverdy, trans. Mary Ann Caws

Around the table
On the shadow's edge
Each one of them quite motionless
And someone abruptly speaks
It's cold outside but here it's peaceful
And the light holds them together
The fire crackles
A spark
The hands have come to rest.
Bluer on top of the tablecloth
Behind the beam of light, a head reads.
Nearly holding its breath.
Everything's falling asleep
The silence drags on
But still it is not time to go
The windowpane mirrors the scene, the family
From a distance the lips all seem to be fervent and praying.

Gerald Finzi (1901-1956)

As I lay in the early sun from *Oh fair to see* Op. 13b
(1921 rev. 1956)
Edward Shanks

As I lay in the early sun,
Stretched in the grass, I thought upon
My true love, my dear love,

Who has my heart for ever,
Who is my happiness when we meet,
My sorrow when we sever.
She is all fire when I do burn,
Gentle when I moody turn,
Brave when I am sad and heavy
And all laughter when I am merry.
And so I lay and dreamed and dreamed,
And so the day wheeled on,
While all the birds with thoughts like mine
Were singing to the sun.

Joshua Borin (b.1989)

Nature is Returning (2020)

from *Isolation Songbook*, commissioned by Helen Charlston
Sophie Rashbrook

The days are long
but the months are short

On our walk last night,
We saw a man playing frisbee on his own
Then, on our way home
9pm, Blackheath Park
We were dodging joggers,
dancing the pavement tango, when...
Did you hear that?

It can't be...

There it is again

It's an owl

An owl in Blackheath!

Hooo-hooo-hoooo!

It's a miracle!

Clap!

Did I get it?

No

I've seen sparrows, bluetits, long-tailed tits,

All manner of tits

Ahem

Collared doves, pigeons,
burbling nonsense on our window-sill
And the less said about the news, the better

New neighbours downstairs,

their stories unspoken

New babies, uncuddled

Final goodbyes, unbidden

But my house plants, cherished, thriving,
like never before

Goldfinches! Woodpeckers!

Mother nature is returning to our cities

Clap

It's there!

By the window! Get it!

Kill the bastard! Quick!

Oh, bloody moths!
They're cleverer than they look
They know where to hide
They are watching us
as we carry on our new lives
our new, gentler lives
Clap

Clap

An empty bus rolls by
And through the window
Spring turns to summer...
Moth! Moth! I see you!

Clap! Clap! Clap

Got you! Ha!

High five!

The months are short

but the days are long...

Juliana Hall (b.1958)

To Mother from *Letters from Edna* (1993)

Edna St Vincent Millay

Do you know, almost all people love their mothers, ...

Due to copyright reasons, we are unable to reproduce the full text of the above song

Nathan James Dearden (b.1992)

the way we go (2020)

from *Isolation Songbook*, commissioned by Helen Charlston

Katharine Towers

the way we go about our lives
trying out each empty room
like houses we might own
eavesdropping for clues in corridors until
standing at a gate or attic window
seeing beauty in a flag of sky
we're gone, leaving the doors open
all the lights burning

Stephen Bick (b.1993)

On His Blindness (2020)

from *Isolation Songbook*, commissioned by Helen Charlston

John Milton

When I consider how my light is spent,
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one Talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless, though my Soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present

My true account, lest he returning chide;
'Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?'
I fondly ask. But patience, to prevent
That rumour, soon replies, 'God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts; who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er Land and Ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait.'

*Translations of 'Ich stand in dunkeln Träumen'; 'Sie liebten sich beide'; 'Liebeszauber';
'Ständchen'; 'Wie Melodien zieht es mir'; 'Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer' and
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stille Lotosblume' and 'Es steht ein Lind' by Richard Stokes. Andrew Brixey-Williams text
by Pierre Reverdy, translated by Mary Ann Caws. Joshua Borin text by Sophie
Rashbrook. Nathan James Dearden text by Katharine Towers.*