

Morgen

“The purpose of transcriptions has never been to “improve “ the original, nor has it been to stimulate an identical effect. It can only be likened to a painter putting on canvas the same tray of fruits, or the same landscape, that others before him have painted. The subject therefore may be identical, but each artist’s approach is different, conditioned by his brush, eyes and creative personality” Janos Starker 1960

It has often been said that the cello closely resembles the human voice because of both its range and timbre. Along with the medium of the string quartet, the great composers of the past expressed many of their most personal and intimate emotions in song, and from all of the romantic 19th century songbook, it is perhaps the songs of Brahms that most lend themselves to the cello. For Brahms, poetry was an excuse for melody, the melody wrapping around the words rather than being dependent on them. His inspiration was always his personal mood; Brahms used the words to set the scene for personal experience.

The first of our disc is **Liebestreu, Op 3 No.1**, which was also the opening song in Brahms’ first published set of songs. It was this stormy song that first impressed Robert and Clara Schumann, leading to the comment, “...*he who is to come*”. Its throbbing repeated chords, portraying urgency and darkness, introduce a mother consoling her daughter, encouraging her to sink her love into the sea like a stone. But the young girl replies that she cannot do this since the blossom will bloom again and the wind cannot wear away her love.

Minnelied, Op 71 No.5, is a dreamy song, full of tenderness and pure, youthful love. The poet cannot imagine life without his beloved and pleads for her never to leave him.

When Brahms’ friend Theodor Billroch received a copy of, “**Immer leise wird mein Schlummer**”, **Op.105 No.2**, he wrote, “...*I could not finish playing it for my tears*”. It is probably inspired by Brahms’ infatuation with a young singer, Hermione Spies, a leading alto of the late 19th century, for whom Brahms composed a number of songs. The girl in the song, knowing she will soon die and that her lover will find someone else, desperately longs for him to knock on her door one last time, despite the anguished realisation that her cry can never be answered.

“**Wie melodien zieht es mir leise durch den Sinn**”, **Op 105 No.1**, is one of Brahms’ most popular songs and yet its meaning is illusive. The poet describes fleeting thoughts which come to mind but then vanish as a spring flower, leaving only a fragrance. Brahms further developed this melody in the first movement of his Sonata for Violin and Piano in A major, Op.100, composed in the same year of 1886.

Sapphische Ode, Op 94 No.4, is a setting by Brahms of a poem by Hans Schmidt, who often traversed the the same musical circles in Vienna. When the singer picks roses on a summer night

he is showered with dew, but when he plucks the fragrant kisses from the lips of his beloved, he feels her tears trickle on his cheek.

Composed in 1879, **Feldeinsamkeit, Op 86 No.2**, is a deeply contemplative song about a man who lies alone on the grass, gazing upwards to the summer sky, reflecting on the gentle floating of the clouds and dreaming of an eternal serenity beyond life itself.

Wiegenlied, Op 49 No.4, the most famous of lullabies, written for singer Bertha Porubsky and her newborn son, shows such tender affection for both mother and child. Much has been written about Brahms' love for Clara Schumann, 14 years his senior and also somewhat of a mother figure. His own mother was 17 years older than her husband and Brahms wrote in his notebook, "*...only one thing on earth is more beautiful than a wife...a mother*".

Although not noted for his encouraging manner, Brahms championed the music of Antonin Dvorak and was largely responsible for bringing him international notoriety. "**Als die alte Mutter**", ("**Songs My Mother Taught Me**"), **Op.55 No.4**, is a haunting and nostalgic song, and the fourth and most popular in a cycle of 7 *Cigánské melodie*, (Gypsy songs), written for the German tenor Gustav Walter, a great admirer of Dvorak. They were written first in German and later translated into Czech. Dvorak helps the strong emotional narrative by writing the vocal part in 2/4 metre against the piano in 6/8.

Although Dvorak's first love was Josefina Kaunitzová, he eventually married her sister Anna. When Josefina fell seriously ill, in 1895, Dvorak was writing his Cello Concerto in B minor, Op. 104, and used the theme from one of her favourite songs, "**Lasst mich allein**", **Op. 82 No.1**, in the melancholy second movement. After Josefina's death, Dvorak revised the ending of the concerto, inserting a slow section with a love duet between the solo cello and first violin, which also references the song.

Reynaldo Hahn was born in Venezuela, but moved with his family of 12 to Paris when he was just 3 years old. At 11 he entered the Paris Conservatoire where he studied composition with Massenet, and piano alongside Cortot and Ravel. Marcel Proust, a friend and lover of Hahn wrote, "Never since Schumann has music painted sorrow, tenderness, the calm induced by nature, with such brush strokes of human truth and absolute beauty". The evocative **L'heure exquise** surely echoes these words. Composed while Hahn was still a teenager and based on a poem from *Fêtes galantes* by Paul Verlaine, it was also inspired by the early works of the painter Antoine Watteau, depicting sumptuously dressed lovers in the moonlight. Its limpid, languid melody describes a scene of stillness and beauty, as the moon reflects on a motionless lake. A *Chloris*, one of his later songs written in 1913, is perhaps his most successful example of a pastiche. *Chloris* was a shepherdess in renaissance literature. Here the bass line of Bach's *Air on a G string* and ornamentation in the piano part takes us back to the baroque.

Hahn is best known for his operas and operettas and after the war became director of the Paris opera. For Hahn, Faure was the last of the great composers, as he had no time for Debussy or the members of *Les Six*, and instead preferred the charming elegance of a Paris which had showered him with praise in his youth.

Faure's **Après un rêve, Op.7 No.1**, describes a dream in which the lover and his beloved leave the earth towards a beautiful light, until the dreamer awakens, longing to return to the "mysterious night", the ecstasy of his dream.

Widmung, Op.25 No.1, is the first of the song cycle *Myrthen*, which Schumann wrote as a wedding present for Clara. It is an unbelievable outpouring of the dedication of all his life to Clara, his love and gratitude to the woman of his dreams. To Clara he wrote, "*as I wrote, I wept for joy*". In the slower middle section, "Du bist die Ruh", he is thinking back to the tenderness of Schubert's song, and in the postlude he quotes Schubert's Ave Maria.

Du bist wie eine Blume, Op.25 No.24, one of Clara's favourite songs, expresses intimacy and devotion, with a hint of sadness. The opening chords are like a meditation in the Schumann's religious key of A-flat. He identifies with the poet wanting to lay his hands on her head and pray that his bride will be forever sweet and pure.

Mondnacht, Op.39 No.5, from the cycle *Leiderkreis*, was written in May 1840, in the time leading up to Schumann's marriage to Clara, who was his inspiration for these songs. It describes the union of earth and sky, but for Schumann this is also linked to his dream of marriage. His musical codes for Clara and for marriage can both be found in this beautiful song, which expresses the tranquillity and stillness of a moonlit night.

Brahms' **Zwei Gesänge, Op.91**, were composed twenty years apart and were both written for his close friend, the violinist, Joseph Joachim. There were published as a pair in 1884 but with the later of the two songs, **Gestillte Sehnsucht**, appearing first. This was a gift to Joachim and his wife Amalie Schneeweiss, who were having marriage problems. The song is a setting of a poem by the German poet, Friedrich Rückert, which speaks of the winds and the birds whispering the world into slumber. The second song, **Geistliches Wiegenlied**, was composed in 1863 originally as a wedding present for the couple, although Brahms retracted it. A year later, he gifted the song to them again on the occasion of the baptism of their son Johannes, named after Brahms. The viola begins alone with a melody taken from the 16th century Christmas carol, "Joseph, lieber Joseph mein", (Joseph, my dearest Joseph), in honour of his friend. Brahms weaves the voice part around the traditional lullaby calling for the night winds to be calm and warm so that the child may sleep peacefully.

Glück, das mir verblieb, (Marietta's lied), is an aria from Erich Korngold's opera *Die tote Stadt*, written when Korngold was only 23. In the opera Paul meets Marietta, a dancer, and is struck by her resemblance to his deceased wife, Marie. In his mind, these images become confused and he joins Marietta in this aria, a heart wrenching song which talks of the pain of love, but the hope that its power will remain beyond death.

Both Schubert songs on this disc speak of a certain loneliness and longing. **Du bist die Ruh, Op.59 No.3**, is a beautiful setting of a text from a set of poems by the German poet Friedrich

Rückert (1788–1866). It is a song of tenderness and longing for the perfect love relationship that Schubert was never to find.

Nacht und Träume, Op.43 No.2, was written as a memorial to the poet Matthäus von Collin, who died suddenly in his forties. The slow semiquavers in the piano part draw the listener into the stillness of another world, into a realm of perfect peace, unfettered by the troubles of this world.

The Italian composer Alfredo Catalani wrote two operas, the more famous being *La Wally*, largely because of this aria, **Ebben? Ne andro lontana**. Here the heroine, Wally, has been ordered by her father to marry against her will. She sings that she will leave and go as far away as the echo of a church bell, never to return, but to be alone in the Tyrolean snow and among clouds of gold. The opera is rarely performed because of the difficulty of staging the scene where the heroine plunges into the avalanche which has already killed her true love. Catalani's friend Toscanini admired the opera and thought it deserved greater acclaim, but it was not until this song was included in the 1981 film *Diva* that it became famous..

Morgen, Op.27 No.4, is one of the finest songs Strauss ever wrote, and was composed as a wedding present for his wife, Pauline. Strauss arranged many of his songs for his wife to sing in concerts that he was conducting, and this is the first example of a song that Strauss orchestrated himself. Being also a fine pianist, he was known to have often improvised on his accompaniments and we think he would have enjoyed hearing this song with the rich timbre of the viola instead of the usual solo violin. The beauty of its simplicity remains, as the song describes unending love and happiness.