

Ilkley Concert Club



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BENJAMIN APPL baritone
with
SIMON LEPPER piano

WANDERER
Schubert

Lieder

Mahler

Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen

English songs

by

Quilter and Somervell

Vaughan Williams

Songs of Travel

Wednesday 19th January 2022
King's Hall

PROGRAMME NOTES

Wanderer

A recital of German Lieder and English songs

Tonight's programme throws light on some of the many ways in which journeying through the vicissitudes of life and love have been interpreted by German and English poets and composers working in different musical genres, from eighteenth and nineteenth century German *Lieder* to twentieth-century English art song.

Lieder

Although *Lied* is the general German word for 'song', the term *Lieder* refers to a distinctive Austro-German genre of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries chiefly associated with the rise of German Romanticism. Aided by a renaissance of German lyric verse, German vernacular song during this period developed into a sophisticated art form in which ideas suggested by the texts were embodied in musical settings for voice and piano. Composers were greatly assisted in this new descriptive writing by the many technical developments in keyboard manufacture during this period and the most important feature of *Lieder* performance became the partnership between the voice and piano which should, ideally, act together as one instrument.

Franz Schubert (1798-1828)

It was Goethe who first recognised that a new art form was about to emerge from the burgeoning Romantic movement by the fusion of music and poetry and it was Schubert who first synthesized this new style and became its unparalleled exponent. He composed more than six hundred songs, demonstrating familiarity with hundreds of textual sources. However, it was his two great *Lieder* cycles *Die schöne Müllerin* (The fair maid of the mill) and *Winterreise* (Winter journey) that chiefly helped to establish the genre and confirmed its potential for musical, poetic and dramatic narrative. Both cycles are lengthy meditations on the theme of the wanderer or traveller, a common motif in German Romantic poetry and one frequently used by Schubert. The wanderer is often depicted as a stranger and outsider, searching for an illusory happiness, a concept that runs through Schubert's works almost as an archetype. *Das Wandern*, the first song on tonight's programme, opens the *schöne Müllerin* cycle.

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

An unhappy love affair in 1884-1885 led to the composition of Mahler's first masterpiece, the song cycle *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* (Songs of a Wayfarer) and, almost simultaneously, the closely related first symphony. The cycle was originally written for voice and piano (an instrument to which Mahler was not attracted) and in 1885-1886 he revised the score extensively. He orchestrated the piano accompaniment in 1890, finding he could only adequately

illustrate the highly subjective character of his texts by employing a full instrumental ensemble. The *fahrenden Gesellen* cycle was first performed, in the orchestral version, in 1897 with Mahler conducting. The overall tone of the cycle is dark and depicts all the contradictory elements of his life and work – the juxtaposition of life and nature with despair and death.

Twentieth-century English song

The early decades of the twentieth century saw a great flowering of English art song. The three composers we hear tonight were grounded, in their different ways, in the influences of English folk music and the high quality of the best English poetry. They were also sensitive to the English social milieu of the period and worked to make a life-enhancing gift available to all.

Born in Windermere (the son of the founder of K. Shoes), **Arthur Somervell** (1863-1937) has his chief legacy in the field of music education. In his lifetime, he was best known as a composer of songs. He was the first composer to set Tennyson's *Maud* and Housman's *A Shropshire Lad*, from which tonight's *White is the Moon* is taken.

The setting of *Now sleeps the crimson petal* by **Roger Quilter** (1877-1953) has been a favourite among singers ever since its publication in 1904, going through many revisions and editions. Quilter's writing is sensitive to the text (taken from Tennyson's *The Princess*) while being flexible, fresh and innovative.

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) - *Songs of Travel*.

Texts by Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894).

1. *The vagabond* – 2. *Let beauty awake* – 3. *The roadside fire* – 4. *Youth and love* – 5. *In dreams* – 6. *The infinite shining heavens* – 7. *Whither must I wander* – 8. *Bright is the ring of words* – 9. *I have trod the upward and the downward slope*.

Songs of Travel marks a major achievement in Vaughan Williams' development as a composer. The cycle was first published between 1905-1907, although the seventh song was not then included and the final song was not added until 1960. Since its introduction *Songs of Travel* has been among Vaughan Williams' most popular works and has been performed by many distinguished recital partnerships. Although not obvious to the listener and despite his many fine songs, Vaughan Williams did not write easily for the piano; his chief interest is always in the vocal lines with the accompaniments filling out the implied harmonies and supporting the singer.

Songs of Travel tells the story of a young man resolutely prepared to meet whatever life holds in store for him and demonstrates a more positive and upbeat approach than either the Schubert or Mahler song cycles, despite its obvious affinities with both. *The vagabond* sets the tone with a sturdy tramping accompaniment that introduces the hero and acts as a *leit-motif*. It is subtly referenced in *Youth and Love* and reappears, together with other quotations, in *I have trod the upward and the downward slope*, the traveller's epitaph and the cycle's poignant conclusion.

BENJAMIN APPL baritone

It is with some pride that in successive months we have welcomed to Ilkley the Doric String Quartet and baritone Benjamin Appl, who have both received much music media attention in the last few weeks: the Doric Quartet for their highly praised recording of Mendelssohn quartets and Benjamin Appl for a new film of Schubert's 'Die Winterreise', shortly to be shown on BBC4.

Appl, born in Regensburg, studied at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Munich and then at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London where he now teaches. Famously mentored as the final private student of the great German baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Benjamin Appl says of this experience 'my years of working with Fischer-Dieskau were invaluable and had a hugely formative influence on me. He was an inspiration, someone always searching and seeking a deeper understanding of music and of life.'

With a baritone voice praised for 'an almost infinite range of colours' Appl's own career has flourished, appearing on the world's most prestigious stages. He is an established recitalist with a wide repertoire and is equally known for his work in oratorio and more recently opera.

SIMON LEPPER piano

Simon read music at King's College Cambridge before studying piano accompaniment at the Royal Academy of Music. He is a noted teacher, currently professor of collaborative piano at the Royal College of Music and since 2003 has been an official accompanist for the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition. In his career as a pianist he has travelled the world, including a tour to India with Benjamin Appl, and performed with a glittering array of singers and in widely varied repertoire. Reviews praise 'sensationally good accompaniment' and Simon's 'sensitivity to words and to the voice', qualities that have put him much in demand with singers.

NEXT CONCERT – 16th FEBRUARY 2022

Two identical performances

6pm (Doors open 5:30pm) | 8:15pm (Doors open 7:45pm)

NATALIE CLEIN cello with **KATYA APEKISHEVA** piano

Ilkley Concert Club

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