



POETS, PEACE AND POWER

Dashon Burton, *baritone*
Michelle Cann, *piano*

In this trembling shadow **John Dowland**
 (1563-1626)

Dichterliebe ("A Poet's Love"), Op. 48 **Robert Schumann**
 (1810-1856)

Im wunderschönen Monat Mai (In the wonderfully fair month of May)
Aus meinen Tränen sprissen (From my tears spring)
Die Rose, die Lilie (The rose, the lily, the dove, the sun)
Wenn ich in deine Augen I (When I look into your eyes)
Ich will meine Seele tauchen (I would plunge my soul)
Im Rhein, im heiligen Strome (In the Rhine, in the fair stream)
Ich grolle nicht (I bear no grudge)
Und wüssten's die Blumen (And if they knew it, the blooms)
Das ist ein Flöten und Geigen (There is a fluting and fiddling)
Hör' ich das Liedchen klingen (I hear the little song sounding)
Ein Jüngling liebt ein Mädchen (A young man loves a girl)
Am leuchtenden Sommermorgen (On a radiant summer morning)
Ich hab' im Traum geweinet (I have in my dreams wept)
Allnächtlich im Traume (Every night in my dreams I see you)
Aus alten Märchen winkt es (From old fairy tales beckons)
Die alten, bösen Lieder (The old, angry songs)

– intermission –

Night **Florence Price**
 (1887-1953)

Balulalow **Peter Warlock**
 (1894-1930)

Schlummert ein ("Slumber now, you weary eyes") **J. S. Bach**
 (1685-1750)

Love bade me welcome (From 5 Mystical Songs) **R. Vaughan Williams**
 (1872-1958)

Riddle Songs - #24 **Scott Perkins**
 (b. 1980)

Mantra **Timothy Takach**
 (b. 1978)

Friday, June 4, 2021
 Smith Opera House
 7:30 pm

This evening's concert features a diverse array of songs that, collectively, explore chiaroscuro in its literal and metaphorical sense—the interplay of light and dark, day and night, and joy and sorrow. Though the songs vary in language and era, they share this common preoccupation. We begin in Elizabethan England, with the ever-melancholy **John Dowland**. Famous for his lute songs and consorts, *In this trembling shadow* appears in Dowland's final publication, *A Pilgrimes Solace* (1612). The composer uses haunting chromaticism to convey the shadows of “humane troubles”, escaping to pure consonance and light only through the “songs to the Lord.”

Robert Schumann's song cycle, *Dichterliebe* (“A Poet's Love”) encapsulates a journey of its own, tracing a love affair from start to finish. Schumann meticulously set sixteen selected poems from Heinrich Heine's *Lyrisches Intermezzo*, mirroring not only affect but also poetic syntax. In the opening song, *Im wunderschönen Monat Mai* (“In the wonderfully fair month of May”), the speaker revels in the glory of spring, when both flowers and love blossom. The music, too, mimics the awakening of nature; a tonally ambiguous piano prelude is only resolved with the entrance of the vocal line. The imagery of flora and fauna is invoked throughout, changing from a symbol of growth and hope (as espoused in songs 1-6) to one of despair and longing. By the twelfth song, *Am leuchtenden Sommermorgen* (“On a shining summer morning”), the same flowers actively pity the speaker, counseling him to forgive his beloved for forsaking him. Their gentle advice, epitomized by the arpeggiated postlude, goes unheeded; the following song, *Ich hab' im Traum geweinet* (“I have in my dreams wept”), reveals the extent of his loneliness, as even his faithful partner, the piano, mostly abandons him. The final song, *Die alten, bösen Lieder* (“The old, angry songs”), dramatically closes the saga, as the speaker consigns his love, grief, and dreams to a watery grave. His resolve to bury the past and move forward is imitated musically by a determined, unyielding rhythm that drives the singer forward. His resolution, however, is slightly undermined by a lengthy piano postlude that harmonically recalls the opening song, and the work concludes nostalgically longing for the promise of new beginnings.

The transition of day to night is described atmospherically in Louise C. Wallace's poem, *Night*. Darkness is reimagined as a loving mother caring for her child, Day. **Florence Price's** setting evokes the mysteriousness depicted in the poem through chromatic alterations and unexpected tonal shifts; a magical A-flat major chord accentuates and introduces the Madonna figure, interrupting the otherwise mundane comfort of the C major opening. The twinkling stars described by Wallace are perhaps heard in the oscillating, flickering figure in the upper voice of the piano.

In the next song, *Balulalow* (“Lullaby,” in old Scottish), the sleeping child is rocked to sleep. Though the poem (a 1567 Scottish translation of Luther's hymn

Vom Himmel Hoch) is old, **Peter Warlock's** music is decidedly modern; while the lilting, regular rhythm is expected, the peculiar harmonic flavoring gives this cradlesong a haunting aesthetic.

Schlummert ein, ihr matten Augen (“Slumber now, you weary eyes”) is the central aria of **J.S. Bach's** solo cantata *Ich habe genug*, BWV 82 (literally, “I have enough”). Composed for the Feast of Purification in 1727, the cantata meditates on a Song of Simeon (*Nunc Dimittis*) found in the Gospel of Luke. According to the narrative, Simeon, having witnessed the Messiah, declared that he could die in peace. The slumber aria, in which the tranquility of sleep is aligned with the eternal joy of heaven, features a rondo-like structure. Bach punctuates an otherwise repetitive piece (in both form and rhythm) with rhetorical pauses; in these silences, we are left to ponder the ceasing of motion that accompanies death and the bittersweet nature of goodbyes.

Like Peter Warlock, **Ralph Vaughan Williams** found inspiration in the poetry of the past; his *Five Mystical Songs* set texts by Elizabethan priest and poet George Herbert. In *Love Bade Me Welcome*, the third of the set, the speaker reflects on his relationship with God, whose unconditional love provides nourishment and salvation. Vaughan Williams' setting underscores the meaning by quoting the plainchant “*O sacrum convivium*,” an antiphon sung in celebration of the Eucharist; it is wordlessly intoned by the piano as the final lines are sung.

Scott Perkins ventures even further into history, setting texts found in the Exeter Book, a tenth-century codex containing Anglo-Saxon poetry. The manuscript transmits nearly one hundred enigmatic riddles, describing quotidian objects in puzzling terms. *lc eom Punderlicu Pihht* (“I am a wondrous creature”) describes a mystery animal that can alter its voice, capable of sounding like a dog, a goose, an eagle, and various other beasts. Perkins asks the singer to similarly sonically shape-shift, with directions like “breathily,” “very nasally,” and “pompously,” while the piano shimmers mysteriously underneath.

Mantra, the first song in **Timothy Takach's** song cycle, *How to Triumph like a Girl*, is a twenty-first century ode to self-care and self-confidence. Sierra DeMulder's poetry offers a humorous yet poignant list of actions to build physical, mental, and emotional wellness. In its supportive simplicity, Takach's setting allows the message to shine through, encouraging us all to seize the day.

– Anya Wilkening