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**Ravel, Saint-Saëns,
Wyner, Hahn, Britten**

**Dominique Labelle, soprano
Yehudi Wyner, piano**

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Maurice Ravel

(1875-1937)

Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé

- ① *Soupir* [3:24]
- ② *Placet futile* [3:46]
- ③ *Surgi de la croupe et du bond* [2:52]

Camille Saint-Saëns

(1835-1921)

- ④ *Aimons-nous et dormons* [3:41]
- ⑤ *L'attente* [2:15]
- ⑥ *La coccinelle* [2:09]
- ⑦ *Tournoiement* [3:16]
- ⑧ *Danse macabre* [2:30]

Yehudi Wyner

(b.1929)

The Second Madrigal: Voices of Women

- ⑨ *Getting Up in Winter (Emperor Chi'ien-wen of Liang)* [1:39]
- ⑩ *In the Morning (Steve Kowitz)* [1:47]
- ⑪ *Morning (Chu Shu Chen)* [2:04]
- ⑫ *When He Pressed His Lips (Steve Kowitz)* [2:59]

chamber music. His recording "The Mirror" on Naxos won a 2005 Grammy Award, his *Horntrio* (1997) was a Finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, "Chiavi in Mano" on Bridge Records was nominated for a 2009 Grammy, and *American Record Guide* placed Bridge's *Orchestra Music of Yehudi Wyner* on its 2009 Year's Top Ten.

In addition to composing and teaching, Yehudi Wyner's active and eclectic musical career has included performing, directing two opera companies, and conducting numerous ensembles in a wide range of repertory, including the music of Bach as a member of the Bach Aria Group. "A comprehensive musician, Mr. Wyner is an elegant pianist, a fine conductor, a prolific composer, and a revered teacher." (Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 2009). He served on the faculties of Yale University, Harvard University, Cornell University, State University of New York, Purchase, Brandeis University, and the Tanglewood Music Center. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and The American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

His music is published by Associated Music Publishers, Inc., (G. Schirmer), and recordings of his music can be found on Naxos, Bridge, New World Records, Albany, Pro Arte, CRI, 4Tay, Columbia Records. He is married to the conductor and soprano, Susan Davenny Wyner.

Ryan Brown (Naxos). She can also be heard on recordings on the Virgin Veritas, Deutsche Harmonia Mundi, RCA Victor Red Seal, Koss, Denon, New World, Carus and Musica Omnia labels.

Born in Montreal and trained at McGill and Boston Universities, she lives in central Massachusetts with her husband and two children. Visit Dominique Labelle on her website: www.dominiquelabelle.com



Pulitzer Prize-winning composer **Yehudi Wyner**, b 1929, is one of America's most distinguished musicians. His compositions include over 100 for orchestra, chamber ensemble, solo voice, piano, chorus, and music for the theater, as well as liturgical services. He has received commissions from Carnegie Hall, the BBC, the Boston Symphony, Library of Congress, Ford Foundation, Koussevitzky Foundation, Fromm Foundation and The National Endowment for the Arts. Honors and awards include the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for his Piano concerto *Chiavi in mano*, two Guggenheim Fel-

lowships, the Rome Prize, the Brandeis Creative Arts Award, and the Elise Stoeger Award from Lincoln Center Chamber Music Society for his lifetime contribution to

- 13 *Thank You, My Fate* (Anna Swir) [2:48]
- 14 *Cosmetics Do No Good* (Steve Kowitz) [4:18]
- 15 *Hopelessness* (Li Ch'ing-chao) [2:49]
- 16 *The Greatest Love* (Anna Swir) [1:22]

Reynaldo Hahn

(1874-1947)

- 17 *Le printemps* [2:16]
- 18 *Le Rossignol des Lilas* [2:00]
- 19 *Fumée* [2:49]
- 20 *Dans la nuit* [1:44]
- 21 *L'heure exquise* [2:20]

Benjamin Britten

(1913-1976)

from Cabaret Songs

- 22 *Calypso* [2:29]
- 23 *Johnny* [4:30]
- 24 *Tell me the Truth about Love* [4:57]
- 25 *Funeral Blues* [2:31]

Yehudi Wyner on collaborating with soprano Dominique Labelle

Our first encounter occurred in the summer of 1988. We were at Tanglewood together, Dominique as a vocal fellow and I as a composer and chamber music teacher. This was the summer of Leonard Bernstein's 70th birthday and festivities were planned to celebrate the occasion. Several composers were invited to write a piece in his honor to be performed at the Music Shed, and in response, I fashioned a joyous comedy composition for 2 sopranos, string bass and piano entitled *Leonardo Vincitore* with original text lauding Bernstein's incredible abilities.

The two sopranos assigned to perform were Lisa Saffer and Dominique Labelle. With no apparent fuss they mastered the challenging vocal lines and sang the performance to sensational success.

Some years passed before I had the chance to work with Dominique again, this time in preparation to perform my song cycle *On this most voluptuous night* with the Boston based ensemble Collage. During the rehearsal process I began to understand the unique character of this artist, not just the brilliance and sensual beauty of her voice, but the depth of her perceptions and emotional communication.

It was from this experience that our real collaboration began, and it has unfolded in an endlessly rich partnership from that time until the present. We have performed a repertory of substantial variety from Purcell to music of the present day. In 1999 I crafted a song cycle especially for Dominique called *The Second Madrigal: Voices of Women*, a work for soprano and eleven



Soprano **Dominique Labelle** enjoys close and enduring collaborations with a number of the world's most respected conductors and composers, particularly Nicholas McGegan, Iván Fischer, Roger Norrington, Jos van Veldhoven, and the Pulitzer Prize winning composer Yehudi Wyner.

Recent and upcoming engagements include Handel's *Messiah*/Seattle Symphony Orchestra; Wyner's *Fragments from Antiquity*/Lexington Symphony; Barber's *Knoxville, Summer of 1915*/Classical Orchestra; Shostakovich's *Seven Romances on Poetry of Alexander Blok*/Mt. Desert Festival of Chamber Music; and ten performances at the Göttingen Festival in Germany with Nicholas

McGegan. She and Mr. McGegan are also collaborating in performances of Handel's *Orlando* and *Alexander's Feast*, with Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra.

Recent appearances with conductor Iván Fischer include the Countess Almaviva in Mozart's *Nozze di Figaro* Teatro Perez Galdos in Las Palmas and in Budapest, a Bach *B-minor Mass* in Washington, D.C., and a Bach *St. Matthew Passion* with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam.

Her most recent recording is Monsigny's *Le Déserteur*, with Opera Lafayette and

21. L'heure exquise

La lune blanche
Luit dans les bois ;
De chaque branche
Part une voix
Sous la ramée...

Ô bien aimée.

L'étang reflète,
Profond miroir,
La silhouette
Du saule noir
Où le vent pleure...

Rêvons, c'est l'heure.

Un vaste et tendre
Apaisement
Semble descendre
Du firmament
Que l'astre irise...

C'est l'heure exquise.

© Grant Lewis

21. The Exquisite Hour

The white moon
shines in the woods.
From each branch
springs a voice
beneath the arbor.

Oh my beloved...

Like a deep mirror
the pond reflects
the silhouette
of the black willow
where the wind weeps.

Let us dream! It is the hour...

A vast and tender
calm
seems to descend
from a sky
made iridescent by the moon.

It is the exquisite hour!

instruments, commissioned by the Koussevitsky Foundation at the Library of Congress. Dominique sang the premiere at the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival and subsequently recorded the cycle for Bridge Records.

We can look back on a succession of recitals in Boston, Williamstown, Princeton, Washington, New York, Montreal, and Moscow. But these are mere external facts. Far more remarkable is the nature of our working relationship. The degree to which we intuit each other's expressive and technical intentions is unusual. Few words are exchanged, explanations are almost nonexistent, decisions are arrived at organically. I cannot describe the astonishment and excitement I sense hearing her interpret a song. It goes far beyond what I could imagine, and it speaks to me with utter truth.

This recording well represents the essence of our collaboration. I am overjoyed to have played a role in its realization. — YW July 2013

Songs by Ravel, Saint-Saëns, Hahn, Britten

Notes by Malcom MacDonald

The traditions of French art song – the *mélodie* as distinct from the older *romance* or the German *Lied* – as a clearly-defined repertoire and phenomenon with its own special character go back to the 1820s. Berlioz was probably the first major composer to write in this idiom, in works like *Irlande* (after the 'Irish melodies' of Thomas Moore) and the song-cycle *Les nuits d'été*, that freed themselves from the rigid strophic form and predominantly lighter mood of the earlier French *romance*. Meyerbeer, Liszt, Gounod, Bizet,

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Tracks 22 and 25: allpoetry.com

Tracks 23 and 24: poemhunter.com

and others contributed to the development of the genre, and the 16 songs composed by Henri Duparc between 1868 and 1877, every one of them a gem, became the touchstone for the idea of what French song might be. Other composers, recognizing the versatility and musical quality of French poetry – and inspired, in the later 19th century, by formal perfection and detachment of the Parnassians (such as Théodore de Banville) and the seductively expressive Symbolist poetry of Verlaine and Baudelaire, in which every detail works towards a unified and self-consistent imaginative whole – moulded the *mélodie* into a typically French tradition of song whose climax was achieved in the marvellous and very different song outputs of Fauré and Debussy.

The name of **Camille Saint-Saëns** is not often invoked in this context. Apparently preternaturally gifted in almost all areas of music - 'He knows everything, but he lacks inexperience' was Hector Berlioz's paradoxical verdict on the young Saint-Saëns, whose dazzling quickness of mind certainly testified to an old head on young shoulders. He started composing at the age of three, gave his first public piano recital at ten, entered the Paris Conservatoire at 13, and was a keen student of the Latin classics, astronomy, geology and archaeology. As performer, editor and publicist he was an advocate of the latest musical trends of Schumann, Liszt and Wagner and at the same time a campaigner for the almost-forgotten masters such as Bach, Handel, Rameau, Gluck, and Mozart. Apart from this – and most important of all – he was also a prolific and prodigiously talented composer in his own right. After the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, Saint-Saëns became one of the leaders of a movement that aimed to strike back at the enemy culturally. He was one of the founders of the *Société Nationale de Musique*, intended

Tant d'ardeur fait en moi renaître
L'écho de mes avrils anciens,
O premier rossignol qui viens!

Provided by Ted Perry

19. Fumée

Compagne de l'ether, indolente fumée,
Je te ressembles un peu...
Ta vie est d'un instant, la mienne est consumée;
Mais nous sortons du feu.

L'homme pour subsister, en recueillant la cendre,
Qu'il use ses genoux,
Sans plus nous soucier et sans jamais descendre,
Evanouissons-nous!

Dr. Thea Engelson, © 2009

20. Dans la nuit

Quand je viendrai m'asseoir dans le vent, dans la nuit,
Au bout du rocher solitaire,
Quand je n'entendrai plus, en t'écoutant, le bruit
Que fait mon cœur sur cette terre,
Ne te contente pas, Océan, de jeter
Sur mon visage un peu d'écume!
D'un coup de lame alors il te faut
m'emporter
Pour dormir dans ton amertume!

© Laura Sylvis

Such ardour re-awakens in me
Echoes of April days long past,
O first nightingale to appear!

19. Smoke

Companion of the ether, indolent smoke,
I resemble you a bit:
Your life is but an instant, my own is consumed
Yet we emerge from the fire.

Man, to subsist, must gather ashes,
Down on his knees!
So without a concern and without ever descending,
Let us vanish!

20. In the night

When I come and sit in the wind, in the night,
On the edge of the rocky cliff,
When I no longer hear, listening to you, the sound
My heart makes on this earth,
Do not be satisfied, Ocean, to toss
On my face a little foam!
With the swipe of a wave you must then
carry me away
To sleep in your bitter depths!

Reynaldo Hahn

17. Le printemps

Te voilà, rire du Printemps!
Les thyrses des lilas fleurissent.
Les amantes, qui te chérissent
Délivrent leurs cheveux flottants.

Sous les rayons d'or éclatants
Les anciens lierres se flétrissent.
Te voilà, rire du Printemps!
Les thyrses des lilas fleurissent.

Couchons-nous au bord des étangs,
Que nos maux amers se guérissent!
Mille espoirs fabuleux nourrissent
Nos coeurs émus et palpitants.
Te voilà, rire du Printemps!

Provided by Ted Perry

18. Le Rossignol des Lilas

O premier rossignol qui viens
Dans les lilas, sous ma fenêtre,
Ta voix m'est douce à reconnaître!
Nul accent n'est semblable au tien!

Fidèle aux amoureux liens,
Trille encor, divin petit être!
O premier rossignol qui viens
Dans les lilas, sous ma fenêtre!

Nocturne ou matinal, combien
Ton hymne à l'amour me pénètre!

17. Spring

Smiling Spring, you have arrived!
Sprays of lilacs are in bloom.
Lovers who hold you dear
Unbind their flowing hair.

Beneath the beams of glistening gold
The ancient ivy withers.
Smiling Spring, you have arrived!
Sprays of lilacs are in bloom.

Let us lie alongside pools
That our bitter wounds may heal!
A thousand fabled hopes nourish
Our full and beating hearts.
Smiling Spring, you have arrived!

18. The nightingale among the lilac

O first nightingale to appear
Among the lilac beneath my window,
How sweet to recognise your voice! There is no
song like yours!

Faithful to the bonds of love,
Trill away, divine little being!
O first nightingale to appear
Among the lilac beneath my window!

Night or morning * O how
Your love-song strikes to my heart!

to give performances of works exclusively by living French composers. He aimed to re-establish French art, particularly by displaying excellence in the 'abstract' forms of symphony, concerto, sonata and chamber music, which the Germans had dominated for nearly a century.

And it is for his work in those forms that Saint-Saëns is generally remembered: his songs may be the least familiar sector of his output. Yet he wrote songs throughout his career, and did so with the total professionalism that he brought to every one of his compositions. His mastery of the medium is absolutely exemplary, every song being beautifully written for the voice and the piano accompaniments – demanding though some of them are – always grateful and full of interest. *L'attente*, a setting of Victor Hugo, may well be his best-known song, and is very early, dating from 1855 when he was only 19. *La coccinelle* is another Victor Hugo setting from 1868.

Like many French composers Saint-Saëns was fascinated by the Orient, and in 1870 he composed a set of six *Mélodies persanes* after the poetry collection *Les nuits persanes* by Armand Renaud (1836-95), a friend of Mallarmé, which had only been published in that year. *Tournoiement*, subtitled *Songe d'opium* (an opium dream), is the last of them and is especially notable for its difficult and brilliant accompaniment. The latest song here, *Aimons-nous*, is a setting of a poem by Théodore de Banville, made in 1892.

One of the best-known of all Saint-Saëns's works is his tone-poem *Danse macabre* of 1874. Less well known is the fact that this brilliant orchestral piece started life two years earlier as a song for voice and piano to words

by Henri Cazalis (1840-1909), another friend of Mallarmé and a physician by profession, though he was also a Symbolist poet (writing under the pseudonym of Jean Lahor) of no mean gifts. His poem arises from the old French superstition that Death appears on Halloween and summons the dead from their graves, commanding them to dance while he plays on his fiddle. In expanding this song into the tone-poem, Saint-Saëns enlarged it and replaced the vocal line with a solo violin, but all of the work's essential material is already present in this brilliant song.

The position of **Reynaldo Hahn** in the history of French song is probably more secure than that of his teacher Saint-Saëns, even though he has sometimes been relegated to its margins as more of a delightful entertainer than a major figure. Born in Caracas, Venezuela, of a German-Jewish father and a Venezuelan Catholic mother of Basque extraction, Hahn spent most of his life in France: a child prodigy, he entered the Paris Conservatoire at the age of ten and became best known as a composer of operettas and café songs, many of which he would sing to his own piano accompaniment. The salon-entertainer image belied a serious and meticulous composer in the tradition of his teachers Massenet and Saint-Saëns, who composed concertos, a splendid Piano Quintet and other notable works which are only beginning to receive their critical due.

Hahn was a mere 12 years old when he began composing his *Chansons grises*, a set of seven songs to words by Paul Verlaine, in 1887. One of these is *L'heure exquise*, and it is recorded that Verlaine himself 'wept to hear' Hahn's treatment of his poetry. With its flowing piano accompaniment, gentle melody,

I know it. Nonetheless,
I primp myself before the glass
like an infatuated schoolgirl
Fussing over every detail,
practicing whatever subtlety
may please him.
I cannot help myself.
The God of Passion has his will of me
& I am tossed about
between humiliation & desire,
rectitude & lust,
disintegration & renewal,
ruin & salvation.

after Vidyapati

15. *Hopelessness*, Li Ch'ing-chao (1084-1142)

When I look in the mirror
My face frightens me.
How horrible I have become!
When Spring comes back
Weakness overcomes me
Like a fatal sickness.
I am too slothful
To smell the new flowers
Or to powder my own face.
Everything exasperates me.
I am frightened by the weird cries
Of the nightjars that I cannot
Shut out from my ears.
I am filled with bitter embarrassment
When I see on the curtains
The shadows of two swallows making love.

Translated from the Chinese by Kenneth Rexroth

16. *The Greatest Love*, Anna Swir

She is sixty. She lives
the greatest love of her life.

She walks arm-in-arm with her dear one,
her hair streams in the wind.
Her dear one says:
"You have hair like pearls."

Her children say:
"Old fool."

*Translated From the Polish by Czeslow Milosz and
Leonard Nathan*

11. Morning, Chu Shu Chen (c. 1200)

I get up. I am sick of
Rouging my cheeks. My face in
The mirror disgusts me. My
Thin shoulders are bowed with
Hopelessness. Tears of loneliness
Well up in my eyes.
I arch and paint my eyebrows
And steam my heavy braids.
My maid is so stupid that she
Offers me plum blossoms for my hair.

Translated from the Chinese by Kenneth Rexroth

12. When He Pressed His Lips, Steve Kowit

When he pressed his lips to my mouth
the knot fell open of itself.
When he pressed them to my throat
the dress slipped to my feet.
So much I know -- but
when his lips touched my breast
everything, I swear,
down to his very name,
became so much confused
that I am still,
dear friends,
unable to recount
(as much as I would care to)
what delights
were next bestowed upon me
& by whom.

after Vikatanitamba

13. Thank You, My Fate, Anna Swir

Great humility fills me,
great purity fills me,
I make love with my dear
as if I made love dying
as if I made love praying,
tears pour
over my arms and his arms.
I don't know whether this is joy
or sadness, I don't understand
what I feel, I'm crying,
I'm crying, it's humility
as if I were dead,
gratitude, I thank you, my fate,
I'm unworthy, how beautiful
my life.

*Translated from the Polish by Czeslaw Milosz
and Leonard Nathan*

14. Cosmetics Do No Good, Steve Kowit

Cosmetics do no good:
no shadow, rouge, mascara, lipstick --
nothing helps.
However artfully I comb my hair,
embellishing my throat & wrists with jewels,
it is no use -- there is no
semblance of the beautiful young girl
I was
& long for still.
My loveliness is past.
& no one could be more aware than I am
that coquettishness at this age
only renders me ridiculous.

and ingenious modulations, Hahn captured the limpid and languid beauty of its text. The *Chansons grises* also excited the admiration of Mallarmé. The other songs by Hahn recorded here are all a good deal later. *Le Printemps*, which sets a poem by Théodore de Banville, is the third of Hahn's set of 12 Rondels composed in 1889. *Dans la Nuit* and *Fumée*, composed between 1904 and 1906, both come from Hahn's song-collection *Les feuilles blessées*, settings of poems by the Greek-born Ioannes Papadiamantopoulos (1856-1910) who wrote under the pseudonym of Jean Moréas and, much influenced by Verlaine, was the author of the *Symbolist Manifesto* published in *Le Figaro* in 1886. He it was who formulated the definition of the symbolist poem as one in which 'all real world phenomena' are described not for their own sake but as 'perceptible surfaces created to represent their esoteric affinities with the primordial Ideals.')

The latest song in this selection, *Le Rossignol des Lilas* of 1913, which sets a poem by Léopold Dauphin, is a perfect example of Hahn's art. Dauphin (1847-?) had himself been a composer, but in middle age, under the influence of his friend Mallarmé, devoted himself to poetry. In Hahn's treatment of the poem, the piano's ceaselessly flowing lines establish a perfect *mis-en-scène* for the gently nostalgic text and the subtly flexible vocal line. While there's no literal imitation of the nightingale's song in the piano accompaniment, the instrumental melody, generally independent of the voice part, creates the impression of a meditation inspired by the sound of the bird's song. At the end, a brief piano postlude makes a graceful conclusion. The singer's lines are more pensive than passionate, but the occasional crescendo, as in the first phrase of the last line, increases the depth of emotion.

The name of Stéphane Mallarmé has already occurred several times in this note, though Saint-Saëns and Hahn were setting his lesser associates rather than the major poet himself. Perhaps his greatest musical monument is no song, but Debussy's epoch-making orchestral *Prélude* based on his *L'Après-midi d'un faun*. Among actual settings of Mallarmé, however, **Maurice Ravel's** *Trois Poèmes* occupy the first rank. In March 1913 Ravel joined Igor Stravinsky at the Swiss resort of Clarens: they had been entrusted by Serge Diaghilev with a joint task, namely the orchestration of various parts of Mussorgsky's unfinished opera *Khovanschina* which the great impresario had down for performance in Paris that summer. During this period Stravinsky showed Ravel his *Three Japanese Lyrics* for voice and ensemble composed the previous December – songs whose scoring and melodic angularity reflect the experience of having heard Arnold Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* in Berlin in November 1912. Ravel, in turn, was inspired to write his *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*, the first of which is dedicated to Stravinsky. (Another factor may have been that a new complete edition of Mallarmé's poetry had just appeared.) When he completed the *Trois Poèmes* Ravel actually proposed mounting a concert – a 'scandalous concert', he called it – in which they would be performed along with Stravinsky's *Japanese Lyrics* and *Pierrot Lunaire*. In fact his songs were indeed premiered together with Stravinsky's, at a concert of the Société Musicale Indépendante in Paris on 14 January 1914, sung by Jane Bathori with an ensemble conducted by Désiré-Emile Inghelbrecht, though the third work on the programme was not the Schoenberg but the *Quatre poèmes hindous* of Maurice Delage. Though Ravel's *Poèmes*, like Stravinsky's *Lyrics*, are usually heard with an

Le roi gambader auprès du vilain!
 Mais psit! tout à coup on quite la ronde,
 On se pousse, on fuit, le coq a chanté
 Oh! La belle nuit pour le pauvre monde!
 Et vive la mort et l'égalité!

King and peasant dancing together!
 But shh! Suddenly the dance is ended,
 They jostle and take flight - the cock has crowed;
 Ah! Nocturnal beauty shines on the poor!
 And long live death and equality!

Translations are courtesy of Société d'art vocal de Montréal

Yehudi Wyner: "The Second Madrigal: Voices of Women"

9. *Getting Up In Winter, Emperor Ch'ien-wen of Liang (503-551)*

Winter morning.
 Pale sunlight strikes the ceiling.
 She gets out of bed reluctantly.
 Her nightgown has a bamboo sash.
 She wipes the dew off her mirror.
 At this hour there is no one to see her.
 Why is she making up so early?

Translated from the Chinese by Kenneth Rexroth

10. *In The Morning, Steve Kowit (b. 1938)*

In the morning,
 holding her mirror,
 the young woman
 touches
 her tender
 lip with
 her finger &
 then with
 the tip of
 her tongue
 licks it &
 smiles
 & admires her
 eyes.

after the Sanskrit

Je passe avec un sifflement,
Et je franchis le Capricorne,
Et je m'abîme au gouffre morne
De la nuit complète et sans borne
Où je tourne éternellement.

8. Danse macabre

Jean Lahor (1840-1909)

Zig et zig et zag, la mort cri cadence
Frappant une tombe avec son talon,
La mort à minuit joue un air de danse,
Zig et zig et zag, sur son violon.

Le vent d'hiver souffle, et la nuit est sombre,
Des gémisséments sortent des tilleuls;
Les squelettes blancs vont à travers l'ombre
Courant et sautant sous leurs grands linceuls.

Zig et zig et zag, chacun se trémousse,
On entend claquer les os des danseurs,
Un couple lascif s'assoit sur la mousse
Comme pour goûter d'anciennes douceurs.

Zig et zig et zag, la mort continue
De racler sans fin son aigre instrument.
Un voile est tombé! La danseuse est nue!
Son danseur la serre amoureusement.

La dame est, dit-on, marquise ou baronne.
Et le vert galant un pauvre charron -
Horreur! Et voilà qu'elle s'abandonne
Comme si le rustre était un baron!

Zig et zig et zig, quelle sarabande!
Quels cercles de morts se donnant la main!
Zig et zig et zag, on voit dans la bande

Whirring on my way.
And I shoot past Capricorn,
And plunge into the dismal abyss
Of absolute and boundless night,
Where I spin and spin eternally.

8. Dance of Death

Tap, tap, tap - Death rhythmically,
Taps a tomb with his heel,
Death at midnight plays a gigue,
Tap, tap, tap, on his violin.

The Winter wind blows, the night is dark,
The lime-trees groan aloud;
White skeletons flit across the gloom,
Running and leaping beneath their huge shrouds.

Tap, tap, tap, everyone's astir,
You hear the bones of the dancers knock,
A lustful couple sits down on the moss,
As if to savour past delights.

Tap, tap, tap, Death continues,
Endlessly scraping his shrill violin.
A veil has slipped! The dancer's naked!
Her partner clasps her amorously.

They say she's a baroness or marchioness,
And the callow gallant a poor cartwright.
Good God! And now she's giving herself,
As though the bumpkin were a baron!

Tap, tap, tap, what a saraband!
Circles of corpses all holding hands!
Tap, tap, tap, in the throng you can see

accompaniment of a small chamber ensemble, Ravel also made a version for voice and piano. By a strange coincidence, just at the same time Debussy set two of the same Mallarmé poems, 'Soupir' and 'Placet futile' as part of his own voice-piano trilogy of *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*: but whereas Debussy rounds off his work with the mildly erotic and evocative 'Eventail', Ravel's appetite for setting himself difficult challenges led him to set one of the most elusive and hermetic of Mallarmé's sonnets, 'Surgie de la croupe et du bond'.

Ravel had been fascinated by Mallarmé's poetry since at least the 1890s (his first surviving Mallarmé setting, *Sainte*, dates from 1896). In an interview published in 1927, Ravel declared that he considered him 'not just the greatest but the *only* French poet ... he exorcised our language, like the magician that he was. He has released the winged thoughts, the unconscious daydreams from their prison'. What Ravel achieved in his *Trois Poèmes* is not so much an interpretation or representation of Mallarmé's texts – poems that resist all simple representation or onomatopoeia in their suave, aloof ambiguity – than a brilliantly imaginative re-imagining of them in musical terms. The first song, 'Soupir', for example, both naively and sophisticatedly true to its title, has the arched structure of a sigh. In the slow and delicate first part the voice rises with exquisite restraint to a subtle climax; while the more expansive second is like a long, languorous exhalation of melancholy.

In 'Placet' futile a vain supplication is offered to a remote and mysterious Princess, surely more a symbol than any woman of flesh and blood. Yet the pride and hauteur of the suppliant shines clearly through angular melodic

lines and intricate chromatic harmonies, while maintaining natural speech inflections. The mood is again one of restraint, holding in check the underlying pain. With the third and final song, 'Surgi de la croupe et du bond' (Rising from its buldge and sten), we have moved into a mysterious musical and emotional territory, where Ravel does seem to be directly reflecting the aura of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*. In this setting of what Ravel once called 'the strangest, if not the most hermetic' of Mallarmé's sonnets – one which has moved so far from making purely verbal sense that it is almost a musical construction in itself, yet one seemingly freighted with intimations of dark and melancholy memory – he responds with music of extreme harmonic vagueness that ties itself up from time to time in knots of anguished dissonance, even occasionally flirting with bitonality. The very spare musical texture is punctured by bell-like octaves on the piano, like a knell.

Born in the year that Ravel composed his *Trois Poèmes*, **Benjamin Britten** may seem an unlikely figure to feature in this French context. Yet Britten, though in some aspects quintessentially English, had a much more cosmopolitan and European outlook than many of his British contemporaries, and French poetry and music meant a great deal to him. Among his earliest notable works is a set of *Quatre chansons françaises*, settings of Victor Hugo and Verlaine, composed in 1928 at the age of 15; and his *Les Illuminations*, settings of Rimbaud for voice and string orchestra made eleven years later, would surely be on any short-list of Britten's most characteristic works. His friendship for Francis Poulenc, and esteem for his music, is also relevant, and it is perhaps in the light of some of Poulenc's songs that we should approach the four *Cabaret Songs*.

7. Tournoiement

Armand Renaud (1836-1895)

Sans que nulle part je séjourne,
Sur la pointe du gros orteil,
Je tourne, je tourne, je tourne,
À la feuille morte pareil.
Comme à l'instant où l'on trépassé,
La terre, l'océan, l'espace,
Devant mes yeux troublés tout passe,
Jetant une même lueur.
Et ce mouvement circulaire,
Toujours, toujours je l'accélère,
Sans plaisir comme sans colère,
Frissonnant malgré ma sueur.

Dans les antres où l'eau s'enfourne,
Sur les inaccessibles rocs,
Je tourne, je tourne, je tourne,
Sans le moindre souci des chocs.
Dans les forêts, sur les rivages;
À travers les bêtes sauvages
Et leurs émules en ravages,
Les soldats qui vont sabre au poing,
Au milieu des marchés d'esclaves,
Au bord des volcans pleins de laves,
Chez les Mongols et chez les Slaves,
De tourner je ne cesse point.

Soumis aux lois que rien n'ajourne,
Aux lois que suit l'astre en son vol,
Je tourne, je tourne, je tourne,
Mes pieds ne touchent plus le sol.
Je monte au firmament nocturne,
Devant la lune taciturne,
Devant Jupiter et Saturne

7. Delirium

Without so much as a pause,
I pirouette on my toe,
Spinning, spinning, spinning,
Like a withered leaf.
As at the moment of death,
The earth, the ocean and space
Pass before my clouded eyes,
Radiating the same light.
And as I rotate round and round,
I accelerate,
Devoid of pleasure as of anger,
Shivering despite my sweat.

In caves aflood with foaming waves,
Standing on inaccessible rocks,
Spinning, spinning, spinning,
I've not the slightest fear of collision.
In the forests and along the coasts,
Surrounded by savage beasts
And their havoc-wreaking rivals,
Soldiers brandishing their swords,
In the centre of slave-markets,
On volcano slopes awash with lava,
In the land of Slavs and Mogols,
I spin and spin unflaggingly.

Adhering to laws that none can defer,
The laws that the sun obeys in its course,
Spinning, spinning, spinning,
My feet no longer touch the ground.
I soar aloft to the starry sky,
I flit right past the silent moon,
Past Jupiter and Saturn,

Du grand mont, du ciel enflammé,
À l'horizon, parmi la brume,
Voyez-vous flotter une plume,
Et courir un cheval qui fume,
Et revenir ma bien-aimée?

6. La coccinelle

Victor Marie Hugo (1802-1885)

Elle me dit: "Quelque chose
Me tourmente." Et j'aperçus
Son cou de neige, et, dessus,
Un petit insecte rose.

J'aurais dû, - mais, sage ou fou,
À seize ans on est farouche, -
Voir le baiser sur sa bouche
Plus que l'insecte à son cou.

On eût dit un coquillage;
Dos rose et taché de noir.
Les fauvettes pour nous voir
Se penchaient dans le feuillage.

Sa bouche fraîche était là;
Je me courbai sur la belle,
Et je pris la coccinelle;
Mais le baiser s'envola.

«Fils, apprends comme on me nomme »,
Dit l'insecte du ciel bleu,
«Les bêtes sont au bon Dieu;
Mais la bêtise est à l'homme.»

From the great mountain, from the flaming sky,
On the sky-line, in the mist,
Can you see a floating plume,
A hurtling, steaming horse - and then
My beloved once again?

6. The ladybird

She said to me: "Something's
Giving me an itching." And I saw
her snow-white neck, and on it
a small rose-coloured insect.

I should - but right or wrong,
At sixteen one is shy -
have seen the kiss on her lips
more than the insect on her neck.

Like a shell it shone;
red back speckled with black.
The warblers, to catch a glimpse of us,
craned their necks in the branches.

Her fresh mouth was there:
Alas! I leaned over the lovely girl,
and dislodged the ladybird,
but ... the kiss flew away!

"Son, learn my name",
said the insect from the blue sky,
"Creatures belong to our good Lord,
but stupidity belongs to man."

Between 1937 and 1939, starting in England and continuing in Canada, Britten composed at least six songs – intended as individual numbers, not a set – that he designated as 'Cabaret Songs'. They were all settings of words by his friend WH Auden – Britten was setting a lot of his poetry at this time – and were written for the versatile singer Hedli Anderson (who later married the poet Louis MacNeice) who specialized in light music of high quality. She included various of these songs in her recital programmes up to the 1960s, and some early performances featured Britten at the piano: they also recorded some of them together for a 78rpm disc that was never issued. The songs remained unpublished in Britten's lifetime and somewhere along the way two of them – *Give up love* and *I'm a jam tart* – were lost; however the other four 'Cabaret Songs' were posthumously published together in 1980 and received their first performance as a set in a BBC Radio broadcast of 16 March 1982 by the soprano Margaret Field and the composer and pianist Douglas Young.

The earliest of them is *Funeral Blues*, which originally formed part of the incidental music Britten wrote in February 1937 for WH Auden and Christopher Isherwood's theatre piece *The Ascent of F6*, first performed that month at the Mercury Theatre, London. This is one of the most famous of all Auden's poems, and acquired a new mass audience through its appearance in the 1994 Richard Curtis film *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. Hedli Anderson was part of the original cast of *F6*, and Britten rewrote the song for her for voice and piano in June 1937 when he visited her at Colwall School, Cornwall, where Auden was teaching. By that time he had already written *Johnny* as an independent song. *Tell me the Truth about Love* followed in January 1938, while the *Calypso* was written in Quebec in the summer of 1939. These

four songs are excellent examples of their genre. The texts are informed by Auden's wit and high spirits, while Britten's settings, clearly influenced by popular hits of the time such as the songs of Cole Porter, slip into the popular vernacular with unerring ease. The geographical text of *Calypso* reflects the fact that poet and composer were then both living in North America: Britten and Pears were in Canada, while Auden was in New York.

— *Notes by Malcolm MacDonald*



Pour laisser ta blancheur plus pure,
Le vent qui jusqu'à terre incline la forêt,
En passant n'oserait
Jouer avec ta chevelure,
Tant que tu cacheras
Ta tête entre mes bras!

Et lorsque nos deux coeurs
S'en iront aux sphères heureuses
Où les célestes lys écloront sous nos pleurs,
Alors, comme deux fleurs,
Joignons nos lèvres amoureuses,
Et tâchons d'épuiser
La mort dans un baiser!

5. L'attente

Victor Marie Hugo (1802-1885)

Monte, écureuil, monte au grand chêne,
Sur la branche des cieus prochaine,
Qui plie et tremble comme un jonc.
Cigogne, aux vieilles tours fidèle,
Oh! vole! et monte à tire-d'aile
De l'église à la citadelle,
Du haut clocher au grand donjon.

Vieux aigle, monte de ton aire
À la montagne centenaire
Que blanchit l'hiver éternel;
Et toi qu'en ta couche inquiète
Jamais l'aube ne vit muette,
Monte, monte, vive alouette,
Vive alouette, monte au ciel!

Et maintenant, du haut de l'arbre,
Des flèches de la tour de marbre,

To make your purity more pure,
The wind which inclines to earth the forest
Would not in passing dare
To frolic with your hair,
While you nestle
You head in my arms.

And when our two hearts
Shall ascend to paradise,
Where celestial lilies shall open beneath our tears,
Then, like flowers,
Let us join our loving lips
And strive to exhaust
Death in a kiss!

5. Anticipation

Squirrel, ascend the towering oak,
To the branch right next to the sky
Bending and trembling like a reed.
Stork, faithful to the ancient towers,
Swiftly ascend and wing your way
From the church to the citadel,
From lofty steeple to mighty keep.

Old eagle, ascend from your eyrie
To the age-old mountain peak,
Whitened by eternal winter.
And you, whom in your unquiet nest,
Dawn never once saw silent -
Joyous lark, ascend, ascend,
Ascend into the sky!

And now, from the high tree-top,
From the spires of the marble tower,

3. Surgi de la croupe et du bond

Surgi de la croupe et du bond
D'une verrerie éphémère
Sans fleurir la veillée amère
Le col ignoré s'interrompt.

Je crois bien que deux bouches n'ont
Bu, ni son amant ni ma mère,
Jamais à la même chimère,
Moi, sylphe de ce froid plafond!

Le pur vase d'aucun breuvage
Que l'inexhaustible veuvage
Agonise mais ne consent,

Naïf baiser des plus funèbres!
À rien expirer annonçant
Une rose dans les ténèbres.

©Peter Low

Camille Saint-Saëns

4. Aimons-nous et dormons

Théodore de Banville (1823-1891)

Aimons-nous et dormons
Sans songer au reste du monde!
Ni le flot de la mer, ni l'ouragan des monts
Tant que nous nous aimons
Ne courbera ta tête blonde,
Car l'amour est plus fort
Que les Dieux et la Mort!

Le soleil s'éteindrait

3. Rising up from its buldge and stem

Rising up from its bulge and stem
of fragile glassware
- with no flowers to crown its vigil -
the vase's neglected neck stops short.

I do believe the mouths
of my mother and her lover
never drank from the same love-cup
(I, sylph of this cold ceiling).

The vase untouched by any drink
except eternal widowhood
is dying yet never consents

- oh naïve funereal kiss! -
to breathe out anything that might herald
a rose in the darkness.

4. Let us love

Let us love and sleep
Without a care for the rest of the world!
Neither ocean waves not mountain storms,
While we still love each other,
Can bow your golden head,
For love is more powerful
Than Gods and death!

The sun would extinguish its rays

The Second Madrigal: Voices of Women, version for soprano and piano (2012)

The Second Madrigal: Voices of Women (1999) was commissioned by Eleanor Eisenmenger, founder and director of Twentieth Century Unlimited of Santa Fe with support from the Koussevitsky Foundation of the Library of Congress. The original scoring for the song cycle was for soprano, string quintet, wind quintet and percussion.

In an early program note introducing the composition* I spoke of finding the texts in an anthology put together by the eminent poet Czeslaw Milosz, poems that were direct and clear yet strongly suggestive of an inner life. I chose poems that were about or by women and that seemed appropriate since the cycle was to be sung by a woman. I also quoted Milosz's philosophy about his selection of the poetry for the anthology. He wrote:

"My proposition consists in presenting poems, whether contemporary of a thousand years old, that are...short, clear, readable and ... loyal towards a reality and attempting to describe it as concisely as possible."

This statement eloquently resonates with my own attitude towards composition, and in *The Second Madrigal* I have tried to embody that ideal in sound.

The Second Madrigal was conceived with the particular voice of Dominique Labelle in mind. Her expressive eloquence inspired me to provide her with a composition worthy of her comprehensive gifts.

I had not planned to make a piano-vocal version of *The Second Madrigal*. The original composition was conceived with the rich array and varied colors of the large ensemble, and I feared a reduction to piano alone would emasculate the sound

world I had created. But the desire to have the composition more widely exposed led me to fashion an adaptation of the original. In this I made numerous alterations to suit the particular resonance of the piano, so that we cannot regard this as a "mere piano reduction."

The new 2012 version of the cycle with its eight poems has surprised me. It conveys a different kind of eloquence and an obvious intimacy, values which I believe enhance the essential humanity of the composition.

— YW 20 July 2013

**Postscript: A more elaborate commentary about the cycle is to be found in the notes for the original recording, BRIDGE 9134.*

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Maurice Ravel *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*

1. Soupir

Mon âme vers ton front où rêve,
ô calme soeur,
Un automne jonché de taches de rousseur,
Et vers le ciel errant de ton oeil angélique
Monte, comme dans un jardin mélancolique,
Fidèle, un blanc jet d'eau soupire vers l'Azur!
-- Vers l'azur attendri d'octobre pâle et pur
Qui mire aux grands bassins sa langueur infinie
Et laisse, sur l'eau morte où la fauve agonie
Des feuilles erre au vent et creuse un froid sillon,
Se trainer le soleil jaune d'un long rayon.

2. Placet futile

Princesse! à jalouser le destin d'une Hébé
Qui point sur cette tasse au baiser de vos lèvres;
J'use mes feux mais n'ai rang discret que d'abbé
Et ne figurerai même nu sur le Sèvres.

Comme je ne suis pas ton bichon embarbé
Ni la pastille ni du rouge, ni jeux mièvres
Et que sur moi je sens ton regard clos tombé
Blonde dont les coiffeurs divins sont des orfèvres!

Nommez-nous... toi de qui tant de ris framboisés
Se joignent en troupeau d'agneaux apprivoisés
Chez tous broutant les voeux et bêlant aux délires,

Nommez-nous... pour qu'Amour ailé d'un éventail
M'y peigne flûte aux doigts endormant ce bercail,
Princesse, nommez-nous berger de vos sourires.

1. Sigh

My soul rises towards your brow o calm sister,
where there lies dreaming
An autumn strewn with russet freckles,
And towards the restless sky of your angelic eye,
As in a melancholy garden,
A white fountain faithfully sighs towards the Azure!
Towards the compassionate azure of pale and pure October,
Which mirrors its infinite languor in the great pools
And, on the stagnant water where the tawny agony
Of the leaves stirs in the wind and digs a cold furrow,
Lets the yellow sun drag itself out in a long ray.

2. Futile Petition

Princess! in envying the fate of a Hebe,
Who appears on this cup at the kiss of your lips,
I use up my ardor, but my modest station is only that of abbé
And I won't even appear nude on the Sèvres porcelain.

Since I am not your bewhiskered lapdog,
Nor lozenge, nor rouge, nor affected games,
And since I know that you look on me with indifferent eyes
Blonde whose divine hairdressers are goldsmiths!

Appoint me ... you whose many raspberry laughs
Are gathered into flocks of docile lambs,
Nibbling at all vows and bleating deliriously,

Appoint me ... in order that Love, with a fan as his wings,
May paint me fingering a flute and lulling this sheepfold,
Princess, appoint me shepherd of your smiles.