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Schubert 9
Town Hall
Wednesday 17 July 2024,
7:30pm

CBSOCO.UK
Concert programme £4



SCHUBERT 9

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INTRODUCTION

For every student of singing, Schubert's songs are the cornerstone of an education into the great world of German Lieder.

Described by Liszt as "the most poetic musician who ever lived", this reputation is partly down to his huge output of over 600 songs over his short lifetime (he died aged 31), but mainly due simply to his extraordinary ability to bring poems alive through his music.

The range of techniques he uses to do this are reflected particularly well in the songs chosen for tonight's concert, two of which are his best-known works; 'Erlkönig' was set up by Schubert himself to be published as his Opus 1, and consequently it became his most popular song, performed by male and female singers alike. It is interesting to note that Schubert's chosen interpreter (Johann Michael Vogl) demanded extra bars of the famous galloping motif be inserted into one section of the accompaniment, so that he would be able to catch his breath!

Another of Schubert's most popular lied, 'Die Forelle', is an excellent example of a strophic song; where many verses are repeated to the same tune (a nightmare for memorisation!), resulting in a building of intensity as the story unfolds and usually ending in a coda containing a 'life lesson' of some kind for the listener.

My personal favourite of this group is 'Im Abendrot'; as in 'Geheimes' and 'Romanze', Schubert employs all his harmonic genius and understanding of poetry to balance the text with a simple yet timeless melody.

Even with just five of these songs side-by-side, one can see why the 'Schubertiad' became popular as evening entertainment in Schubert's lifetime and still remains so into the present day; every poem sits in its own perfectly-crafted and private musical world, and since his output was so varied, one can sit and listen to an hour's worth of these songs and be transported from each world to the next; the perfect escape from our busy lives.



Schubert, Rosamunde Romanze, 4mins

Schubert (arr. Berlioz), Der Erlkönig, 2mins

Schubert (arr. Britten), Die Forelle, 5mins

Schubert (arr. Reger), Im Abendrot, 4mins

Interval

Schubert, Symphony No.9, 57mins

I. Andante – Allegro, ma non troppo

II. Andante con moto

III. Scherzo – Allegro vivace

IV. Allegro vivace

Edward Gardner, Conductor

Mary Bevan, Soprano

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SCHUBERT 9

Schubert was an absolute master of melody and his 'lieder' (songs) still pack a punch 200 years after he wrote them. In tonight's performance, these songs range from the romantic to the terrifying, and Mary Bevan and Edward Gardner bring out every nuance in the vibrant orchestrations. Schubert's Symphony No.9 (the last he wrote) is a suitably grand final word.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

ROSAMUNDE ROMANZE

DER ERLKÖNIG

(arranged by Hector Berlioz)

DIE FORELLE

(arranged by Benjamin Britten)

IM ABENDROT

(arranged by Max Reger)

Franz Schubert was the most Viennese of composers – the son of a city schoolteacher, and a boy-chorister at Vienna's Imperial Seminary. That all ended when his voice broke, and he scribbled the exact moment it happened in the score of the piece he happened to be singing at the time: "Schubert, Franz, croaked for the last time, 26th July 1812". Reluctantly, he agreed to train as a schoolteacher; while privately aspiring to follow in the footsteps of Beethoven. Easier said than done for an unknown student from a lower middle-class family (he'd been mocked as a "millers' boy" by his schoolmates because of his secondhand clothes). It was hard to get symphonies performed, let alone operas, and a young composer needs to earn a living as well as a reputation.

But Schubert did have one regular outlet for his genius. Like young people in any century, his Viennese friends were a lively, sociable bunch. Money might be short, but for entertainment all they needed was a piano and a friend (male or female) with a decent voice. Over the course of his short life, Schubert wrote more than 600 songs for voice and piano. Some he sold to publishers, others were intended for performance in coffeehouses and at the social gatherings that came to be known as "Schubertiads". Viennese to their core, Schubert and his café followers understood that the most profound experiences in life can come from little things: a moment of solitude, a good cup of coffee, or a song shared with friends.

Schubert composed most of his songs for voice and piano, but we're beginning with an exception. When in late November 1823 he was commissioned to write orchestral music for a new play, *Rosamunde, Princess of Cypress*, he could hardly afford to refuse. Alas, *Rosamunde* seems to have been a turkey: "empty, tedious, unnatural" was one of the kinder reviews. Only Schubert's music survives, including this *Romanze*: a song of moonlit love and longing, set to a lilting melody and accompanied by an orchestra that seems to sigh with all the tenderness of a spring night.

Yet within a few years of Schubert's death, a new generation of composers began to appreciate the scale of what he'd achieved, and what music had lost. To a composer like the great French romantic Hector Berlioz (1803-1869), the piano seemed too small a vehicle for a vision as wild and powerful as *Erlkönig* (The Erl-King) (1815) – the 18-year old Schubert's terrifying mini-drama of a father and son pursued on horseback by a malevolent spirit. In 1860, Berlioz transformed it into a miniature opera, complete with thunder and galloping strings. Beware: this dark fairytale does not end happily...

Die Forelle (The Trout) (1817) is an altogether more cheerful tale (unless you're a fish), and Benjamin Britten arranged it in 1942 for a small orchestra that flows and bubbles like the stream in the poem. Anyone who knows Schubert's "Trout" Quintet knows this tune, and Schubert's Viennese friends loved the song so much that he often had to make copies for them to take home.

Schubert composed *Im Abendrot* (At Sunset) early in 1827, less than two years before his untimely death, and when it was first sung (at a Schubertiad at the house of his friend Josef von Spaun) his assembled friends were so moved that they immediately asked to hear it again. The German composer Max Reger (1873-1916) made this lovely orchestral version in 1914, just before the lights went out across Europe, though to a true romantic,

of course, a prayer at sunset can have many meanings. The melody is deceptively simple; the emotions it conveys are almost limitless. Schubert still aspired to write symphonies, but by the end of his career as a songwriter, he could make even four minutes of music contain whole worlds.

Franz Schubert (1797 – 1828)

SYMPHONY NO. 9 IN C MAJOR ("GREAT")

- I. Andante – Allegro, ma non troppo
- II. Andante con moto
- III. Scherzo: Allegro vivace
- IV. Allegro vivace

When a piece of music is called "Great", it's not always helpful – you might prefer to be the judge of a piece's greatness yourself. But Schubert never called his last completed symphony anything of the sort: in fact, he never even heard it performed. The nickname was coined long after his death, and in German, it simply means "large" (as opposed to Schubert's considerably shorter "small" Symphony in C major, No.6). But it stuck because it makes a point. This symphony is big. It lasts a good hour, and the orchestra – unusually for the period – uses three trombones. When Schubert completed it, in March 1825 at the age of 28, no composer except Beethoven was thinking on anything like this scale.



No wonder contemporaries found it baffling. Schubert sent a copy of the symphony to Vienna's leading concert promoters, who rejected it as "too long and difficult". It was never played in Schubert's own short lifetime, and lay forgotten until January 1839, when the composer Robert Schumann paid a visit to Schubert's grave in Vienna. There wasn't a single flower on it. "It occurred to me as I walked back to the city", he recalled:

that Schubert's brother Ferdinand still lived [...] He knew me as an outspoken admirer of his brother, told me much and finally showed me some of his treasures, namely those of Franz's compositions still in his hands. The assembled riches set me trembling with joy! Where to begin? Where to stop? He showed me, among other things, the scores of a number of symphonies, some still unheard, some examined and put away as too difficult and extravagant.

What happened next is well-established: Schumann rescued the score and Mendelssohn conducted the premiere of Schubert's Great C major Symphony in Leipzig on 21st March 1839. Not everyone was convinced: the first London performance had to be abandoned when the musicians broke down in giggles. Within a short time, however, word started to spread that this was music on a new and magnificent scale. The nickname stuck – and no question, this symphony is still a huge challenge to its performers (musicians call it the "Great C Monster").

The key, for the listener, is to embrace that scale – breathe out, stretch your imaginative limbs, savour the spaciousness. Schubert hit on an idea that's still being explored in contemporary electronic dance music and "minimalist" compositions: the power of repetition. Time becomes space. The overall effect is like a journey through a vast landscape (Schubert loved walking in the Alps) – sometimes slowly, sometimes at breathtaking speed, but always moving forward. Schubert lays it all out at the



OIL PAINTING, AFTER WATERCOLOR (1825).
WILHELM AUGUST RIEDER, PUBLIC DOMAIN, VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

very beginning. A noble horn call opens up huge vistas, then leads into a slow, expansive march that finally, deliberately, gathers momentum and accelerates into the symphony proper. In the first and fourth movements the music moves in huge paragraphs, and the two inner movements are on an equally grand scale.

In the Andante the oboe sings a bittersweet walking song that gradually builds to a story of passionate heartbreak. And then he walks on. The Scherzo that follows is a huge, whirling dance with an unmistakably Viennese swing. And finally, a vigorous call to action launches a massive, high-speed finale whose driving rhythmic patterns never once flag. Schubert briefly salutes Beethoven's Ninth Symphony before peeling off and spinning away down his own, very different but equally mighty path – hurtling towards the finishing line with (in the words of the Scottish musicologist Donald Tovey) "the momentum of a planet in its orbit".

© Richard Bratby

SCHUBERT, ROSAMUNDE ROMANZE

German source: Wilhelmina Christiane von Chézy.

Der Vollmond strahlt auf Bergeshöhn –
Wie hab ich dich vermisst!
Du süßes Herz! es ist so schön,
Wenn treu die Treue küsst.

Was frommt des Maien holde Zier?
Du warst mein Frühlingsstrahl!
Licht meiner Nacht, o lächle mir
Im Tode noch einmal!

Sie trat hinein beim Vollmondschein,
Sie blickte himmelwärts:
„Im Leben fern, im Tode dein!“
Und sanft brach Herz an Herz.

SCHUBERT (ARR. BERLIOZ), DER ERLKÖNIG

German source: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und
Wind?
Es ist der Vater mit seinem Kind:
Er hat den Knaben wohl in dem Arm,
Er fasst ihn sicher, er hält ihn warm.

Mein Sohn, was birgst du so bang dein
Gesicht?“
Siehst, Vater, du den Erlkönig nicht?
Den Erlenkönig mit Kron' und Schweif?
Mein Sohn, es ist ein Nebelstreif.

Du liebes Kind, komm, geh mit mir!
Gar schöne Spiele spiel' ich mit dir;
Manch' bunte Blumen sind an dem Strand,
Meine Mutter hat manch gülden Gewand.

English translation © Richard Wigmore.

The full moon beams on the mountain tops;
how I have missed you!
Sweetheart, it is so beautiful
when true love truly kisses.

What are May's fair adornments to me?
You were my ray of spring.
Light of my night, O smile upon me
once more in death.

She entered in the light of the full moon,
and gazed heavenwards.
'In life far away, yet in death yours!'
And gently heart broke upon heart.

English translation © Richard Wigmore.

Who rides so late through the night and
wind?
It is the father with his child.
He has the boy in his arms;
he holds him safely, he keeps him warm.

'My son, why do you hide your face
in fear?'
'Father, can you not see the Erlking?
The Erlking with his crown and tail?'
'My son, it is a streak of mist.'

'Sweet child, come with me.
I'll play wonderful games with you.
Many a pretty flower grows on the shore;
my mother has many a golden robe.'

Mein Vater, mein Vater, und hörest du nicht,
Was Erlenkönig mir leise verspricht?
Sei ruhig, bleibe ruhig, mein Kind:
In dürren Blättern säuselt der Wind.

Willst, feiner Knabe, du mit mir gehn?
Meine Töchter sollen dich warten schön;
Meine Töchter führen den nächtlichen Rein
Und wiegen und tanzen und singen dich
ein.

Mein Vater, mein Vater, und siehst du nicht
dort
Erlkönigs Töchter am düstern Ort?
Mein Sohn, mein Sohn, ich seh es genau:
Es scheinen die alten Weiden so grau.

Ich liebe dich, mich reizt deine schöne
Gestalt;
Und bist du nicht willig, so brauch ich
Gewalt.
Mein Vater, mein Vater, jetzt fasst er mich
an!
Erlkönig hat mir ein Leids getan!

Dem Vater grauset, er reitet geschwind,
Er hält in Armen das ächzende Kind,
Erreicht den Hof mit Mühe und Not:
In seinen Armen das Kind war tot.

SCHUBERT (ARR. BRITTEN), DIE FORELLE

German source: Schubart, Christian

In einem Bächlein helle,
Da schoß in froher Eil'
Die launische Forelle
Vorüber wie ein Pfeil.
Ich stand an dem Gestade
Und sah in süßer Ruh
Des muntern Fischleins Bade
Im klaren Bächlein zu.

'Father, father, do you not hear
what the Erlking softly promises me?'
'Calm, be calm, my child:
the wind is rustling in the withered leaves.'

Won't you come with me, my fine lad?
My daughters shall wait upon you;
my daughters lead the nightly dance,
and will rock you, and dance, and sing you
to sleep.

Father, father, can you not
see
Erlking's daughters there in the darkness?
'My son, my son, I can see clearly:
it is the old grey willows gleaming.

I love you, your fair form allures
me,
and if you don't come willingly, I'll use
force.
Father, father, now he's seizing
me!
The Erlking has hurt me!

The father shudders, he rides swiftly,
he holds the moaning child in his arms;
with one last effort he reaches home;
the child lay dead in his arms.

English translation © Richard Wigmore

In a limpid brook
the capricious trout
in joyous haste
darted by like an arrow.
I stood on the bank
in blissful peace, watching
the lively fish swim
in the clear brook.

Ein Fischer mit der Rute
Wohl an dem Ufer stand,
Und sah's mit kaltem Blute,
Wie sich das Fischlein wand.
So lang dem Wasser Helle,
So dacht ich, nicht gebricht,
So fängt er die Forelle
Mit seiner Angel nicht.

Doch endlich ward dem Diebe
Die Zeit zu lang. Er macht
Das Bächlein tückisch trübe,
Und eh ich es gedacht,
So zuckte seine Rute,
Das Fischlein zappelt dran,
Und ich mit regem Blute
Sah die Betrogene an.

SCHUBERT (ARR. REGER), IM ABENDROT

German source: Karl Lappe

O wie schön ist deine Welt,
Vater, wenn sie golden strahlet!
Wenn dein Glanz herniederfällt,
Und den Staub mit Schimmer malet;
Wenn das Rot, das in der Wolke blinkt,
In mein stilles Fenster sinkt!

Könnst' ich klagen, könnt' ich zagen?
Irre sein an dir und mir?
Nein, ich will im Busen tragen
Deinen Himmel schon allhier.
Und dies Herz, eh' es zusammenbricht,
Trinkt noch Glut und schlürft noch Licht.

An angler with his rod
stood on the bank
cold-bloodedly watching
the fish's contortions.
As long as the water
is clear, I thought,
he won't catch the trout
with his rod.

But at length the thief
grew impatient. Cunningly
he made the brook cloudy,
and in an instant
his rod quivered,
and the fish struggled on it.
And I, my blood boiling,
looked on at the cheated creature.

English translation © Richard Wigmore

How lovely is your world,
Father, in its golden radiance
when your glory descends
and paints the dust with glitter;
when the red light that shines from the
clouds falls silently upon my window.

Could I complain? Could I be apprehensive?
Could I lose faith in you and in myself?
No, I already bear your heaven
here within my heart.
And this heart, before it breaks,
still drinks in the fire and savours the light.

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EDWARD GARDNER



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Edward Gardner is Principal Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Music Director of Den Norske Opera & Ballett. He additionally serves as Honorary Conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, following his tenure as Chief Conductor. In demand as a guest conductor, recent seasons saw Edward debut with The Cleveland Orchestra, Staatskapelle Berlin, Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, and Wiener Symphoniker; while returns included engagements with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, and Montreal Symphony. In the field of opera, following eight years as Music Director at English National Opera, Edward built a strong relationship with New York's Metropolitan Opera where he has conducted productions of *Damnation of Faust*, *Carmen*, *Don Giovanni*, *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Werther*. In London there are plans to return to the Royal Opera House after productions of *Káťa Kabanová* and *Werther*, and in Munich he returns to the Bayerischer Staatsoper following Britten's *Peter Grimes* and Verdi's *Otello*. Elsewhere, he has conducted at La Scala, Chicago Lyric Opera, Glyndebourne Festival Opera and Opéra national de Paris.

MARY BEVAN

Mary Bevan's engagements for 2023/24 include Cleopatra *Giulio Cesare* with Opera di Roma, Dido *Dido and Aeneas* with Barokksolistine and her debuts with Opernhaus Zürich (*La Folie Platée*) and the Salzburg Festival. Last season she sang Morgana *Alcina* for the Royal Opera House, *LIGHT: Bach Dances* with Hofesh Shechter Company at Philharmonie de Paris, Eurydice *Orfeo and Eurydice* at Teatro La Fenice and the title role *La Calisto* in her Bayerische Staatsoper debut. Previously she performed with Opera de Monte Carlo, Teatro Real Madrid, English National Opera, Royal Danish Opera and the Bolshoi. In concert, Bevan has toured across Europe, Australia, Asia and the US and made her Carnegie Hall debut with the English Concert (Harry Bicket). She has also appeared with the BBC Symphony and BBC Concert orchestras, Kammerorchester Basel, Handel and Haydn Society Boston, Philharmonia Baroque, Australian Chamber Orchestra, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Academy of Ancient Music and at the BBC Proms. Bevan's many recitals include regular appearances at Wigmore Hall, and she has recorded extensively. She was awarded an MBE in the Queen's birthday honors list, 2019.



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