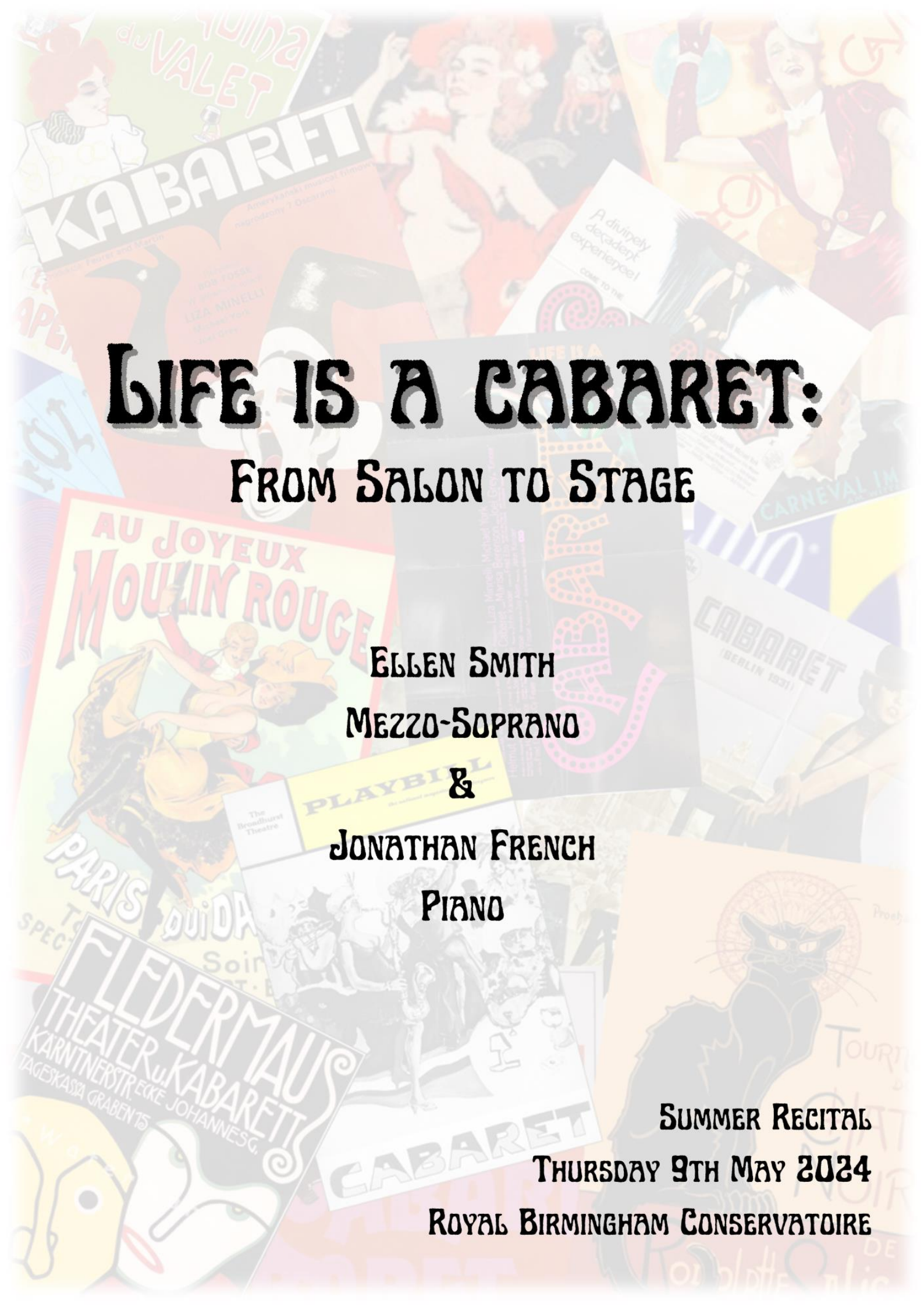

Life is a Cabaret:

From Salon to Stage

Ellen Smith

Mezzo-Soprano

&

Jonathan French

Piano

Summer Recital

Thursday 9th May 2024

Royal Birmingham Conservatoire

Cabaret *(noun):* A restaurant or night-club in which entertainment is provided as an accompaniment to a meal; also, the entertainment so provided, a floor-show. Originates from the Middle French dialect (Picard or Walloon) *camberete*, meaning *small room*.

Oxford English Dictionary.

Cover image: Montage of vintage cabaret posters

Cover design: Ellen Smith

"What good is sitting all alone in your room?
Come hear the music play.
Life is a cabaret, old chum,
Come to the cabaret!"

Lyrics from the 1966 Broadway Musical, "Cabaret"
Music: John Kander, Lyrics: Fred Ebb

Life is a cabaret:

From salon to stage.

Ellen Smith: *Mezzo-Soprano*

Jonathan French: *Piano*

The very mention of the word ‘Cabaret’ typically conjures up images of dimly lit nightclubs, single spot-lit stages, glasses clinking, patrons gossiping at tables. Perhaps even a slinky gowned singer draped over the piano…No doubt Liza Minnelli’s starring role as Sally Bowles in a 1972 film of the same name crosses some folks’ minds – depending on who you ask. The word itself has its origins in a now scarcely spoken Middle French Dialect - *camberet*, meaning ‘small room’. This word in turn most likely comes from the Norman French *chamber*, meaning ‘tavern’.

Yet this act of performing music to a smaller, though no less appreciative audience in a much more intimate setting is by no means a new concept. Add in the highly likely possibility of sharing a drink or two, such a concept is not that much different from what we now understand by a ‘cabaret’. For centuries, composers have written music intended for these smaller settings – dinner parties, salons, perhaps even the drawing room of a Monarch or two.

Indeed, celebrated Austrian composer and father of Lieder, Schubert, regularly wrote songs intended to entertain at the many private dinner parties he attended or even hosted. These *Schubertiads*, where laughter surely flowed and drinks were aplenty, were where much of the composers’ most loved Lieder would first have been performed.

As such, the concept of composing smaller scale works for voice and piano, in essence, cabaret songs, is something which composers have been playing with long before the illustrious character of Sally Bowles ever tread the boards.

In my recital this afternoon, then, I hope to share with you a selection of pieces which were never intended to grace the stages of larger concert halls, rather, they sprung into existence for the sole purpose of entertaining a smaller, though no less eager selection of patrons. Be that as a result of where they fall in the opera, or where they may have had their first airings, *Life is a Cabaret: From Salon to Stage* is my offering of what is only a small selection of the *many* ‘cabaret’ style songs we are blessed with in today’s musical catalogue.

Programme:

- Chacun à son gout (Die Fledermaus) – *Johan Strauss II (1825 - 1899)*

- Cabaret Songs – *Benjamin Britten (1913 - 1976)*
    1. *Tell me the truth about love*
    2. *Funeral Blues*
    3. *Johnny*
    4. *Calypso*

- Danse Macabre – *Camille Saint-Saëns (1835 – 1921)*

- Ah! Quel dîner (La Périchole) – *Jaques Offenbach (1819 – 1880)*

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- Song of a Nightclub Proprietress (Five Betjeman Songs) – *Madeleine Dring (1923 – 1977)*
- Frühlingsglaube – *Franz Schubert (1797 – 1828)*

- Du bist die Ruh' – *Franz Schubert*

- Ständchen (Op. 106 – Fünf Lieder) – *Johannes Brahms (1833 – 1897)*

- Cabaret Songs (Volumes 1 & 2) – *William Bolcom (b. 1938)*
    - *Toothbrush Time*
    - *Song of Black Max (As told by the de Kooning boys)*
    - *Amor*

- Je te veux – *Erik Satie (1866 – 1925)*

Chacun à son gout – Die Fledermaus:

Johann Strauss II (1874)

Arguably one of his best-known works, Strauss' *Die Fledermaus* needs little introduction. An opera in three acts with a libretto from Karl Haffner and Richard Genée, *Die Fledermaus* is based on an 1851 farce by German playwright Julius Roderich Benedix originally entitled *Die Fledermaus was Das Gefängis (The Bat was the Prison).* Some twenty or so years later, Strauss composed his operatic spectacle, and it premiered at the *Theater an der Wien*, Vienna on 5th April 1874.

From its opening bars, *Die Fledermaus* proves itself a "sparkling confection of mistaken identities, illicit liaisons, and champagne-fuelled merriment'. We are introduced to kaleidoscope of characters, each with their own agenda – a secret affair, evading prison, revenge…

It is in the second act, however, that we are introduced to the illustrious Russian nobleman Orlofsky. Initially revelling in the splendour of the evening he has created, the charming (although arguably unhinged) young prince proudly proclaims how much he enjoys welcoming eager socialites into his presence. It is not long, however, before he intimates how soon he bores of his gossiping guests. They are, however, not permitted to show any sign of *ennui*, nor are they allowed to refuse his generous offers of more drink – that privilege is reserved for him, and him alone as host!

With a simple staccato chordal accompaniment, Strauss ensures the spoilt Prince's vocal line is the most prominent element of this aria – heaven forbid anything should outshine his moment of indulgence. Remaining fairly rhythmically simple for the most part, when a dotted rhythm in the vocal line, coupled with carefully placed acciaccatura appear in the *poco meno* section; the audience begins to realise this young man has likely progressed passed the tipsy stage. Hiccups, perhaps stifled giggles, the audience can only watch as he slowly reveals his guests' unfortunate fate, should they not live up to his expectations of how they ought to behave in his presence.

Chacun à son gout:

Ich lade gern mir Gäste ein,;
Man lebt bei mir recht fein.
Man unterhält sich, wie man mag,
Oft bis zum hellen Tag.

Zwar langweil' ich mich stets dabei,
Was man auch treibt und spricht;
Indes, was mir als Wirt steht frei,
Duld' ich bei Gästen nicht!

Und sehe ich, es ennuyiert,
Sich jemand hier bei mir,
So pack' ich ihn ganz ungeniert
Werf' ihn hinaus zur Tür.

Und fragne Sie, ich bitte
Warum ich das denn tu'?
'S is mal bei mir so Sitte,
Chacun à son gout!

Wenn ich mit andern sitz' beim Wein
Und Flasch' um Flasche leer',
Muss jeder mit mir durstig sein,
Sonnst werde grob ich sehr.

Und schenke Glas um Glas ich ein,
Duld' ich nicht Widerspruch;
Nicht leiden kann ich's wenn sie schrein:
Ich will nicht, hab' genug!

Wer mir beim Trinken nicht pariert,
Sich zieret wie ein Tropf,
Dem werfe ich ganz ungeniert
Die Flasche an den Kopf!

Text: Karl Haffner & Richard Genée

To each his own taste:

I love to invite guests in my home,
One feels quite comfortable here with me.
One amuses oneself, as one will,
Often to the light of day.

Although I am always bored,
No matter what one does or says;
Yet, what for me as host is my privilege,
I will not tolerate from my guests!

And if I see that someone finds it boring
Here in my house,
Then, without further ado, I grab him
By the collar and throw him out the door!

Go ahead and ask, I beg you,
Why would I do such a thing?
It is just my custom,
To each his own taste!

When I sit down with others for wine
And empty bottle after bottle
Everyone must remain as thirsty as I
Otherwise I am likely to get very rough.

When I start pouring glass after glass,
I do not tolerate any resistance;
I cannot stand it when one cries:
I do not want to, I have had enough!

Whoever does not equal me in drinking,
Or needs coaxing like some baby,
Then without further ado,
I toss the bottle at his head!

Translation: IPA Source/Martha Gerhart

Cabaret Songs:

Benjamin Britten (1937–1939)

Starting life as part of the incidental music for the play *The Ascent of F*6, written by his long-time friend and collaborator, the poet W.H. Auden; Britten's Cabaret songs began to spring into existence in early 1937. Of all the music composed for Auden's spectacle, however, it was a blues number, to which the poet's *Stop all the clocks* text was set, which proved itself the most striking. Upon a visit to Auden in June 1937, Britten shared a 'new' solo version of this blues movement. They tried it out with singer and original *F6* cast member, Heldi Anderson, and it instantly proved a firm favourite. At the same time, Britten also busied himself with what he described as 'cabaret songs', thought to also be for Ms Anderson – thus, this next set of pieces began to take shape. Britten's meticulous attention to detail is evident in each piece, with specific dynamics placed at just the right moment. Rhythms are articulated just so, in order to really draw out the essence of each word at the most opportune moments.

Tell me the truth about love, is a prime example of the perfect pairing in Britten and Auden. A young woman's plight to discover the elusive 'truth' about one of life's greatest forces unfolds with her questions becoming more ludicrous as the pieces progresses. Auden's uncanny wit is evident in the text, which Britten compliments with mischievous vamp accompaniment against a tripleted vocal line, leaving us wondering if the poor individual will ever find her answer.

Taking its name from the blues movement from which it began life, *Funeral Blues* paints a bleak picture of an individual navigating a great loss. Their world has stopped, shouldn't the rest of the world also stop? Alas, no, life must go on. Bell-like chords in the opening bars signal the death knell ringing. The accompanying piano increases in complexity as the piece progresses, signifying the never-ending cycle of grief which must be endured, until eventually the vocal line reaches its upper echelons, as if to shout at the heavens who have ripped out this grieving individual's heart.

The third in the set introduces us to a hapless young woman, desperately trying to win the affections of her dear *Johnny.* Britten draws on a number of different styles in this piece, most notably writing a quasi-coloratura section for the singer in the opera verse, and including a waltz section to conjure images of romantic stroll down the Seine in Paris. Alas, however, the hopeless romantic finds themselves quite literally sinking deep, deep down in the closing verse, with Britten pushing the vocal part to its lowest limit.

The final in the set takes us across the pond as it were. Composed around mid-1939, at a time when both Britten and Auden were spending time in North America, *Calypso* introduces us to a young individual simply brimming with excitement at the prospect of reuniting with her lover in Grand Central Station, New York. A rhythmically thundering piano accompaniment can almost be mistaken for the train on which she is travelling, and with a referee whistle part written into the score, Britten paints us a striking picture of a locomotive riding *faster, faster, faster…*

In a diary entry from 10th May 1937 (notably two years before the set was completed), after running through some early sketches of the *Cabaret Songs*, Britten excitedly writes "they are going to be hits, I feel!". It is hard to argue that the four which made the final set could be anything other.

1: Tell me the truth about love:

Liebe, l'amour, amor, amoris…

Some say that love's a little boy
And some say it's a bird,
Some say it makes the world go round
And some say that's absurd:

But when I asked the man next door
Who looked as if he knew,
His wife was very cross indeed
And said it wouldn't do.

Does it look like a pair of pyjamas
Or the ham in a temp'rance hotel,
O tell me the truth about love.
Does its odour remind one of llamas
Or has it a comforting smell?
O tell me the truth about love.

Is it prickly to touch as a hedge is
Or soft as eiderdown fluff,
Is it sharp or quite smooth at the edges?
O tell me the truth about love.

I looked inside the summer house,
It wasn't ever there,
I've tried the Thames at Maidenhead
And Brighton's bracing air;

I don't know what the blackbird sang
Or what the roses said,
But it wasn't in the chicken run
Or underneath the bed.

Can it pull extraordin'ry faces,
Is it usually sick on a swing,
O tell me the truth about love.
Does it spend all its time at the races
Or fiddling with pieces of string,
O tell me the truth about love.

Has it views of its own about money,
Does it think Patriotism enough,
Are its stories quite vulgar but funny?
O tell me the truth about love.

Your feelings when you meet it,
I am told you can't forget,
I've sought it since I was a child
But haven't found it yet;

I'm getting on for thirty-five,
And still I do not know
What kind of creature it can be
That bothers people so.

When it comes, will it come without warning
Just as I'm picking my nose,
O tell me the truth about love.
Will it knock on my door in the morning
Or tread in the bus on my toes,
O tell me the truth about love.

Will it come like a change in the weather,
Will its greetings be courteous or bluff,
Will it alter my life altogether?
O tell me the truth about love.

Text: W.H. Auden

2: Funeral Blues:

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling in the sky the message
He is dead,

Tie crepe bands round the white necks
Of the public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear
Black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South,
My East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last forever:
I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now:
Put out ev'ry one,
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun,
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the woods;
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

Text: W.H. Auden

3: Johnny:

O the valley in the summer
When I and my John
Beside the deep river
Walk on and on.
While the grass at our feet
And the birds up above
Whispered so soft in reciprocal love,
And I leaned on his shoulder,
'O Johnny, let's play':

But he frowned like thunder,
And he went away.

O the evening near Christmas
As I well recall
When we went to the
Charity Matinee Ball
The floor was so smooth
And the band was so loud
And Johnny so handsome
I felt so proud,
'Squeeze me tighter, dear Johnny,
Let's dance till day':

But he frowned like thunder,
And went away.

Shall I ever forget at the Grand Opera
When music poured out of
Each wonderful star?
Diamonds and pearls hung like ivy down
Over each gold and silver gown;
'O Johnny I'm in heaven,'
I whispered to say:

But he frowned like thunder
And went away.

O, but he was as fair
As a garden in flower,
As slender and tall as
The great Eiffel Tower,
When the waltz throbbed out
Down the long promenade,
O his eyes and his smile
Went straight to my heart;
'O marry me, Johnny,
I'll love and obey':

But he frowned like thunder
And he went away.

O last night I dreamed of you,
Johnny, my lover;
You'd the sun on one arm
And the moon on the other,

The sea it was blue,
And the grass it was green,
Ev'ry star rattled a round tambourine;
Ten thousand miles deep
In a pit there I lay:

But you went away.

Text: W.H. Auden

4: Calypso:

Driver, drive faster and make a good run
Down the Springfield Line under
The Shining sun.
Fly like an aeroplane, don't pull up short
Till you brake for the
Grand Central Station, New York.

For there in the middle of that waiting hall
Should be standing the one
That I love best of all.
If he's not there to meet me
When I get to town,
I'll stand on the pavement
With tears rolling down.

Driver, drive faster,
Driver, drive faster.

For he is the one that I love to look on,
The acme of kindness and perfection.
He presses my hand and
He says he loves me
Which I find an admirable peculiarity.

Driver, drive faster,
Driver, drive faster,
Driver, drive faster, drive faster.

The woods are bright green
On both sides of the line;
The trees have their loves
Though they're different to mine.

But the poor fat old banker
In the sun-parlour car
Has no one to love him
Except his cigar.

Driver, drive faster,
Drive faster, drive faster,
Drive faster, faster,
faster, faster, faster.

If I were the head of
The Church or the State,
I'd powder my nose and
Just tell them to wait.

Drive faster, faster,
Faster, faster, faster, faster,
Faster, faster, faster.

For love's more important
And powerful than
Even a priest or a politician,

Faster, faster,
Faster, faster, faster.

Ah, la, la, la…

Faster, drive faster,
Drive faster, drive faster,
Drive faster, faster, faster…

Text: W.H. Auden

Danse Macabre*:*

Camille Saint-Saëns (1872)

Perhaps better known in its orchestral form (which premiered in 1875), Saint-Saëns' *Danse Macabre* was originally conceived as an art song for voice and piano. With text from the French poet Henri Cazalis, and based on the play *Danza Macàbre* by Italian playwright Camilla Antona-Traversi, this particular iteration was composed three years earlier, in 1872. Earliest performances were most likely intended for a smaller, more intimate setting than the concert halls and theatres we hear this work played in today.

Legend has it that, as the clock strikes midnight on Halloween, the macabre figure, Death, appears and calls upon the dead to awaken from their slumber and dance for him as he plays his fiddle. There in the graveyard, his skeletons dance until the cockerel crows, signifying the sun rise and the end of their gruesome saraband - Until the next year.

Although many may be familiar with Saint-Saëns' avid use of the xylophone in the orchestral version, it is the delicate staccato of the piano part in the interlude sections which evoke the sound of bones clacking. In addition, the sinister sounding bare tritone chords, first featured in the opening four bars and then interspersed throughout; coupled with the onomatopoeic *zig et zig et zag* which features heavily in the text, conjure the image of Death himself scratching and scraping away on his *aigre instrument.*

Perhaps realising its potential, Saint-Saëns eventually expanded the piece in 1874, replacing the vocal line with a solo violin, and it is this particular incarnation which is most heavily featured in popular culture today - notably for my generation, it is recognised as the theme tune for BBC's *Jonathan Creek.* One cannot help but wonder, however, if it would have had quite the same longevity had Saint-Saëns resolved to let it remain a humble (although admittedly rather *macabre*) salon song.

Danse Macabre:

Zig et zig et zig, la mort en 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 gémissements sorten des tilleuls;
Les squelletes blancs
Vont à travers l'ombres
Courant et sautant
Sous leurs grand linceuls,

Zig et zig et zig, chacun se trémousse,
On entends claquer les os des danseurs,
Un couple lascif s'asseoit 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 amourusement.

La dame est, dit-on,
Marquise ou baronne.
Et le vert gallant 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
Le Roi gambader auprés du vilain!

Mais psit! Tout à coup on quitte le ronde,
On se pousse, en fuit,
Le coq a chanté
Oh! La belle nuit pour le pauvre monde!
Et vive la mort et l'égalite!

Text:Henri Cazalis

Dance of Death:

Zig and zig and zig, Death rhythmically
Taps upon a tomb with his heel,
Death at midnight plays a dance air,
Zig and zig and zag, on his violin.

The winter wind blows
And the night is gloomy,
Groaning comes from the lime trees;
White skeletons
Move through the shadows
Running and jumping
Under their large shrouds,

Zig and zig and zig, everyone is moving,
We hear the bones of the dancers clacking,
A lascivious couple sits upon the moss,
As if to taste
Ancient pleasures again.

Zig and zig and zag, Death continues
Scraping without end his shrill instrument,
A veil has fallen! The dancer is nude!
Her partner squeezes her amorously.

The lady is said to be
A marchioness or baroness.
And the crude gallant a poor cartwright –
Horrors! And look, she gives herself to him
As though the churl were a baron!

Zig and zig and zig, what a saraband!
What circles of the dead, all holding hands!
Zig and zig and zag, we see in the crowd
King frolicking with peasant!

But shh! Suddenly the dance is over,
One pushes, one takes flight:
The rooster has crowed;
Oh! What a beautiful night for the poor world!
And long live Death and Equality!

Translation: Emily Ezust, Lieder.Net Archive

Ah! Quel diner (La Périchole)*:*

Jacques Offenbach (1868)

Loosely based on the 1828 Prosper Mérimée play *Le carrosse du Saint-Sacrement* (*The carriage of Saint Sacrament)*, Offenbach's *La Périchole* was first performed in a two-act version at Paris' *Théâtre des Variétés* on 6th October, 1868. A revised three-act version (which is more widely performed today) was later revived in 1874. An *opéra bouffe* with a libretto from Ludovic Halévy and Henri Meilhac , *La Périchole* follows the plight of two impoverished Peruvian street performers, Périchole and Piquillo - hopelessly in love, but too poor to afford a marriage licence. When the lecherous Viceroy of Peru, Don Andrès vows to make Périchole his mistress, it seems the end is in sight for this once promising love story.

The opera opens with the townsfolk celebrating the birthday of this illustrious Viceroy. Don Andrès enters with Don Pedro de Hinoyosa (Mayor of Lima) and Count Miguel de Panatellas (First Gentleman of the Bedchamber). Although disguised, the crowd recognise them instantly, only pretend not to. It is here where Don Andrès encounters Périchole. Immediately encapsulated by her beauty, he offers her a position as a lady in waiting - an offer she is initially reluctant to accept, suspecting he has more planned for her. She eventually concedes, only when the Viceroy brings the promise of banquets. After writing her farewell letter to the unfortunate Piquillo, Périchole finds herself at the most splendid of feasts. Plied with (what she believes to be the most exquisite) wine, this short but rather comical aria ensues.

Offenbach's *La Périchole*, much like Bizet's *Carmen*, is a prime example of composers exploring the idea of an 'exotic other'. Set in South America, it is only fitting that the score is littered with *boleros*, *seguidillas* and *galops*. Unlike *Carmen*, however, the opera does not end in tragedy. Love prevails, Périchole and Piquillo are reunited, and the Viceroy resolves to permit them to live out the rest of their days without any more of his meddling.

Ah! Quel dîner (La Périchole):

Ah! Quel dîner, je viens de faire,
Et quel vin extraordinaire,
J'en ai tant bu, mais tant, tant, tant,
Que je crois bien que maintenant

Je suis un peu grise, un peu grise,
Mais chut!
Faut pas qu'on le dise
Chut! Faut pas, faut pas.
Chut!

Si ma parole est un peu vague,
Si tout en marchant je zigzague,
Et si mon œil est égrillard,
Il ne faut s'en étonner car

Je suis un peu grise, un peu grise,
Mais chut!
Faut pas qu'on le dise
Chut! Faut pas, faut pas.
Chut!

Ah! What a dinner (The Périchole):

Ah! What a dinner I have just had,
And what extraordinary wine,
I have drunk much, but so much, so much,
That I believe certainly that now

I am a little tipsy, a little tipsy,
But shush!
Don't tell anyone
Shush! Don't tell, don't tell,
Shush!

If my speech is a little slurred,
If when walking I zig zag,
And if my eye is bawdy,
It should not make one surprised because

I am a little tipsy, a little tipsy,
But shush!
Don't tell anyone,
Shush! Don't tell, don't tell,
Shush!

Text:Henri Meilhac & Ludovic Halévy

Translation: Bard Suverkrop, IPA Source

Song of a Nightlucb Proprietress (Five Betjemen Songs)

Madeleine Dring (1976)

One of the most celebrated female composers of the 20th century, Madeleine Dring began her musical life studying violin (with a second study in piano) in the Junior department of the Royal College of Music, London. Soon adding the formal study of composition in the later years of her time at Juniors, Dring continued this education at a senior level in the College, studying with the celebrated Herbert Howells, and occasionally Ralph Vaughan Williams. Despite such a pedigree of teachers, however, Dring's composition style bares little to no resemblance to either composer, preferring instead to forge her own path, develop her own sound.

Upon the death of her violin teacher, W.H. Reed, Dring resolved to cease her study of the instrument, instead focusing on piano and composition. Additionally, her love of theatre led her to also study mime, drama and singing. Her passion for these two mediums melded together well, with her earliest professional works created for the stage, radio and television. Preferring to compose smaller scale works, much of Dring's catalogue consists of pieces for solo piano, duets, some chamber music and short, cabaret style songs.

Dring particularly preferred the more jazz centred style of the likes of Gershwin and Cole Porter, and this is particularly evident in this next piece. Taken from a set of five pieces with text from the poet John Betjeman, (rather inventively named *Five Betjemen Songs*), *Song of a Nightclub Proprietress* is the second in the collection. Dring's passion for theatre is particularly evident in this piece, which paints a bleak picture of a once much admired and much adored socialite in her later years. Having partied too hard for too long, she laments on the old days, but quickly realises these are long gone, and she must now accept her fate as a tired out, washed up shell of her former self.

The Gershwin/Porter influence is particularly evident here, with the piano part delivering chromatically jazzy progressions, as if to emulate the proprietress stumbling around in the harsh morning light. A momentary shift to the major in the middle section offers some relief as the woman reminisces of happier times with her various *beaux*; but a swift return to the minor in the final section quickly diminishes any hope of reliving these. Now, perhaps realising her time is coming to an end, the proprietress is acutely aware that she must live out the remainder of her days, *ill, old, terrified…and tight!*

Song of a Nightclub Proprietress
(Five Betjeman Songs)

I walked into the nightclub in the morning,
There was Kummel on the handle of the door,
The ashtrays were unemptied,
The cleaning unattempted,
And a squashed tomato sandwich on the floor.

I pulled aside the thick magenta curtains,
So Regency, so Regency, my dear
And a host of little spiders
Ran a race across the ciders
To a box of baby 'pollies by the beer.

Oh sun upon the summer going bypass
Where ev'rything is speeding to the sea,
And wonder beyond wonder
That here where lorries thunder
The sun should ever percolate to me.

When Boris used to call in his Sedanca,
When Teddy took me down to his estate,
When my nose excited passion,
And my clothes were in the fashion,
When my beaux were never cross if I was late,

There was sun enough for lazing upon beaches
There was fun enough for far into the night;
But I'm dying now and done for,
What on earth was all the fun for?

I am ill
And old
And terrified

And tight.

Text: John Betjeman

Schubert Lieder

(1820 & 1823)

One of the most prolific musical figures to have emerged from the early 19th Century, Austrian born composer Schubert amassed quite the catalogue during his relatively short life. Showing an uncommon gift for music at an early age, Schubert received tuition in violin and piano from his father and brother respectively. Soon surpassing what they were able to teach him, however, in 1808, aged 11, he began lessons at the *Stadtkonvikt* school. Leaving in 1813 to pursue teacher training, it seems his heart was not in this particular vocation; indeed, it is not a career path he ended up following for long.

Although his music did not garner the recognition it rightly deserves during his lifetime (this in fact came in the decades following his death); his small but close-knit circle of friends regularly gathered to appreciate his work. Such gatherings soon became known as *Schubertiads*, with the first one thought to be late January of 1821. Celebrated Schubert Biographer O.E. Deutsch describes the spectacle as such: "a kind of evening party among friends and their families at which music by Schubert alone was to be heard." Much of the over 600 Lieder for which Schubert is perhaps best known likely had their first airings at one of these *Schubertiads*.

Frühlingsglaube:

Not straying far from a popular poetic theme of the time, nature, *Frühlingsglaube (faith in spring),* inspires its listener to hold on to the promise that the colder days are disappearing. With text from the poet Johan Ludwig Uhland, Schubert lovingly crafts a lilting accompaniment in the piano suggesting a trickling stream freshly freed from the winter frost. Cushioning the vocal line, this particular Lied reminds us that the snow is melting, flowers are blossoming once more, and spring is near.

Du bist die Ruh:

Originally an untitled work from the poet Friedrich Rückert, Schubert used the first line of the poem, *Du bist die Ruh (You are the rest)* as the name for this Lied. Rückert would later go on to name his poem *Kehr ein bei mir (Stay with me).* A seemingly simple melody line reflects the 'peace' of the text, whilst an unobtrusive piano accompaniment further enhances this sense of calm and loving. Perhaps one of Schubert's more well-known Lieder, one can only imagine the soothing effect it must surely have had on eager revellers at one of his celebrated dinner parties.

Frühlingsglaube:

Die linden Lüfte sind erwacht,
Sie säuseln und wehen Tag und Nacht,
Sie schaffen an allen Enden.

O frischer Duft, o neuer Klang,
Nun armes Herze, sei nicht bang,
Nun muss sich alles, alles wenden.

Die Welt wird schöner
Mit jedem Tag,
Man weiß nicht, was nocht warden mag,
Das Blühen will nicht enden.

Es blüht das fernste,
Tiefste Tal,
Nun armes Herz, vergiss der Qual
Nun muss sich alles, alles wenden

Faith in spring:

The soothing breezes have woken up,
They are rustling and weaving day and night,
They are creating things everywhere.

Oh fresh fragrance, oh new sound!
Now poor heart, do not be anxious!
Now everything, everything has to change.

The world is going to become more beautiful
With every day,
Nobody knows what might still happen,
The blossoming does not want to end.

The most distant,
deepest valley is coming into blossom.
Now poor heart, forget your distress!
Now everything, everything has to change.

Text: Johan Ludwig Uhland

Translation: Malcolm Wren, schubertsong.uk

Du bist die Ruh':

Du bist die Ruh'
Der Friede mild,
Die Sehnsucht du
Und was sie stillt.

Ich weihe dir
Voll Lust und Schmerz
Zur Wohnung hier
Mein Aug und Herz.

Kehr ein bei mir,
Und schließe du
Still hinter dir
Die Pforten zu.

Treib andern Schmerz
Aus dieser Brust
Voll sei dies Herz
Von deiner Lust.

Dies Augenzelt,
Von deinem Glanz
Allein erhellt,
O full es ganz.

You are the rest:

You are the rest,
The gentle peace,
You are the longing,
And what quiets it.

I dedicate to you
Full of pleasure and pain,
As a dwelling place here
My eyes and heart.

Come to me,
And close
Quietly behind you
The gates.

Drive other pain
Out of this breast!
May this heart be full
Of your joy.

The temple of my eyes
By your radiance
Alone is brightened.
Oh fill it completely!

Text: Friedrich Rückert *Translation: Bard Suverkorp, IPA Source*

Ständchen (Op. 106 Fünf Lieder)

Johannes Brahms (1886)

Coming a little later than Schubert, German composer Johannes Brahms brings us the final piece in our set of Lieder. Born into a musical family, he had his first music teacher in his father. His later piano teacher, Otto Friedrich Willibald Cossel remarked that he could be a good pianist, if only he could stop his 'never ending composing'. Brahms' parents equally discouraged this 'past time', feeling he would have better career prospects as a performer. The young Brahms, however, did not listen.

This next Lied, a literal serenade, is quick to conjure up the sense that anything could happen on this moonlit evening. Arpeggiated spreads in the introduction reflect the trickling of a solitary fountain in an otherwise still landscape. This image is further developed with an ascending staccato pattern, again in the piano, depicting the droplets bouncing from the splash of water cascading down. Students emerge from the shadows, drinking and revelling in the moonlight with their instruments in tow – an almost vamp like feel in the piano reflects their late-night jollity.

An almost dream like transition is created from rippling broken chords of the piano, and we are let into the dreams of the loveliest one *(Schönsten).* Again, bouncing staccato chords reignite this sense that anything is possible, and as she sees her blonde-haired beau, she playfully teases him to *vergiß nicht mein* – forget me not!

Ständchen

Der Mond steht über dem Berge
So recht für verliebte Leut';
Im Garten rieselt ein Brunnen,
Sonst Stille weit und breit

Neben der Mauen im Schatten
Da stehn der Studentin drei,
Mit Flöt' und Geig' und Zither
Und singen und spielen dabei,

Die Klänge schleichen der Schönsten
Sacht in den Traum hinein,
Sie schaut den blonden Geliebten
Und lispelt: Vergiß nicht mein.

Serenade

The moon hangs over the mountain
So fitting for love-struck people.
In the garden trickles a fountain;
Otherwise, it is still far and wide.

Near the walls, in shadows,
There stand the students three,
With flute, and fiddle and Zither,
They sing and play there.

The sounds waft up to the loveliest of women,
Gently entering her dreams.
She gazes on her blond lover
And whispers: "Forget me not!"

Text: Franz Theodor Kugler

Translation: Emily Ezust, Lieder.Net

Cabaret Songs (Volumes 1 & 2):

William Bolcom (1977 - 1985)

The most current composer in my recital this afternoon, American born William Bolcom has a string of accolades to his name. Entering the University of Washington at the tender age of 11, it was here that Boclom studied composition and piano privately. He would later go on to study with the likes of Darius Milhaud at Mills College, California, and none other than Olivier Messian at the Paris Conservatoire, wherein he received the *2ème Prix de Composition.* Over the course of his career, he has been awarded the *Pulitzer Prize for Music* in 1988, the *National Medal of Arts* in 2006, and in 2007 was named *Composer of the Year* by *Musical America*.

Much of Bolcom's earlier influences included Béla Bartók and Roy Harris, although from the 1960s onwards he strove to embrace a wider and more eclectic variety of styles, and his ambition is to erase the boundaries between popular music and art song. He has recorded many of his own compositions and has received great acclaim for his recordings of Gershwin and Joplin.

This next set of pieces find themselves in a collection of some 24 cabaret songs which span four volumes. They were composed for his wife and long-time collaborator, Mezzo-Soprano Joan Morris, with whom he has recorded more than two dozen albums. He writes in the programme notes for this collection, "These songs are not written with operatic voice-classifications in mind, although they are performable and have often been so. Thus, they can be fairly efficacious training in theatre-style performance".

With text from another long-time collaborator, lyricist/librettist Arnold Weinstein, each piece demonstrates Bolcom's innate ability to fuse different musical styles together with ease. Drawing on inspiration from the jazz idiom, Musical Hall show tunes and Vaudeville, Bolcom's *Cabaret Songs* prove a true kaleidoscope of some of the most prominent musical styles of the 20th/21st Century.

Toothbrush Time:

Weinstein's witty text introduces us to a hapless individual who seems to be unable to break the cycle she finds herself in. Regretting last night's decisions, she is left lamenting at how her 'guest' has overstayed his welcome yet seems to have no problem making himself at home. A seemingly clumsy sounding pattern in the piano throughout give the impression of him crashing around her home, and at one point we can staccato clusters played up the octave as if to suggest the clock ticking as she waits (in vain) for him to leave. Bolcom at times intersperses her exasperations with short piano interludes, as if to suggest a response to the few interactions she is eventually able to muster with her new 'friend'; but in the end, the prospect of remaining alone for yet another night is just too much. Despite her *many* reservations, she simply cannot help herself.

Song of Black Max (As told by the de Kooning boys):

One of the more sinister cabaret songs in the collection, *Song of Black Max* takes us to the 'spectacle' that is nighttime in Rotterdam. Weinstein paints a rather garish picture of everyone and everyone sampling the 'delights' on offer - the town's most dignified mingle with society's outcasts, but neither dare to acknowledge the others' presence in this shady underworld. No one that is, except the elusive figure of Black Max.

Bolcom draws on a number of different musical styles in this cabaret song. A vaudevillian style vamp opens the piece, and a dissonant descending pattern leading us into the *looks for sale* section is reminiscent of a once resplendent but now long forgotten merry go round. A mechanical sounding motif gives the sense of a broken music box when accompanying the lady organ grinder, and towards the end, a similarly menacing sounding motif can be heard interrupting the vamp as the narrator realises, too late, that they can never escape the watchful eye of *Black Max…*

Amor:

The most playful in this particular set, *Amor* offers us a very tongue-in-cheek insight into a particularly eventful day for the woman narrating. Recognising very quickly that her looks seem to be causing all sorts of delightful occurrences, she revels in the free ice cream, the adoring gazes all round, and how everything just seems so much better in this town since she arrived. Bolcom's penchant for jazz is particularly evident here, with sumptuously syncopated rhythms and even a scat section written into the vocal part.

The good times, it seems, cannot last, and eventually our narrator is pulled into court to face the consequences of the havoc her presence has caused. Narrowly escaping any sort of reprimand (owing, most likely, to her sheer magnetism), she reluctantly resolves to leave town. She is comforted, however, in the knowledge that such a day will most likely never be forgotten. Upon passing the local church, the words at the end of prayer are not *Amen*, but…

Toothbrush Time (1983):

It's toothbrush time,
Ten a.m. again and toothbrush time.
Last night at half-past nine
It seemed O.K.
But in the light of day
Not so fine
At toothbrush time.

Now he's crashing round my bathroom
Now he's reading my degree,
Perusing all my pills
Reviewing all my ills
And he comes out smelling like me.

Now he advances on my kitchen,
Now he raids ev'ry shelf
Till from the pots and pans
And puddles and debris
Emerges three eggs
All for himself.

Oh, how I'd be ahead
If I'd stood out of bed;
I wouldn't sit here grieving
Waiting for the wonderful moment
Of his leaving.

At toothbrush time, toothbrush time,
Ten a.m. again and toothbrush time.

I know it's sad to be alone
It's so bad to be alone,
Still I should've known
That I'd be glad to be alone.
I should've known, I should've known!
Never should have picked up the phone
And called him.

"Hey…uh, listen, uhm,
Uh, I've got to, uh…
Oh, you've gotta go too?
So glad you understand.

And… by the way,
Did you say nine tonight again?
See you then."

Toothbrush time!

Text: Arnold Weinstein

Song of Black Max –
As told by the de Kooning Boys (1979):

He was always dressed in black,
Long black jacket, broad black hat,
Sometimes a cape,
And as thin, and as thin as rubber tape:
Black Max.

He would raise that big black hat
To the big-shots of the town
Who raised their hats right back,
Never knew they were bowing to
Black Max.

I'm talking about night in Rotterdam
When the right night people of all the town
Would find what they could
In the night neighbourhood of
Black Max.

There were women in the windows
With bodies for sale
Dressed in curls like little girls
In little dollhouse jails.

When the women walked the street
With their beds upon their backs,
Who was lifting up his brim to them?
Black Max!

And there were looks for sale,
The art of the smile,
Only certain people walk that mystery mile:

Artists, charlatans, vaudevillians,
Men of mathematics,
Acrobatics and civilians.

There was knitting needle music
From the lady organ grinder
With all her sons behind her,

Marco, Vito, Benno
(Was he strong! Though he walked like a woman)
And Carlo, who as five…
He must be still alive!

Ah, poor Marco had the syph
And if you didn't take the terrible cure
Those days you went crazy
And died
And he did.

And at the coffin
Before they closed the lid,
Who raised ***his*** *lid?*
Black Max.

I was climbing on the train
One day going far away
To the good old U.S.A.

When I heard some music
Underneath the tracks.
Standing there beneath the bridge
Long black jacket, broad black hat,
Playing the harmonica, on hand free
To lift that hat to me:

Black Max,
Black Max,
Black Max.

Text: Arnold Weinstein

Amor (1978):

It wasn't the policeman's fault
In all the traffic roar
Instead of shouting "halt!"
When he saw me
He shouted "Amor,

Amor
Amor
Amor."

Even the ice cream man
(free ice creams by the score)
Instead of shouting Butter Pecan
One look at me
He shouted "Amor

Amor
Amor."

All over town it went that way
Everybody took off the day
Even philosophers understood
How good was the good
'cuz I looked so good!

The poor stopped taking less
The rich stopped needing more
Instead of shouting "no" and "yes"
Booth looking at me shouted "Amor!"

Da de da (scat)

My stay in town was cut short
I was dragged to court.
The judge said I disturbed the peace
And the jury gave him what for!

The judge raised his hand
And instead of Desist and Cease
Judgie came to the stand
Took my hand
And whispered "Amor

Amor
Amor
Amor."

Night was turning into day
I walked alone away.
Never see that town again.

But as I passed the church house door
Instead of singing Amen
The choir was singing "Amor"

Da de da (scat)

Amor
Amor
Amor

Text: Arnold Weinstein

Je Te Veux:

Erik Satie (1902)

Coming from rather humble beginnings, French composer Erik Satie did not begin his musical career with much success. Despite showing signs as a promising pianist in his early years, it appears the Paris Conservatoire wherein he initially studied did not agree with the young composer. Describing it as a "district prison with no beauty inside", this reflected in his progress there. He was described as "gifted but indolent", and "the laziest student in the conservatoire". Perhaps it was a relief then, when, as a result of his unsatisfactory performance, he was expelled in 1882.

Finding more freedom working on the café/cabaret scene in Paris' Montmartre, he soon became the resident pianist for the popular *Chat Noir* cabaret club. It was here that the young Satie, free from his somewhat restrictive upbringing "enthusiastically embraced the reckless bohemian lifestyle."

Faring better as a mature student, Satie returned to study, this time at Paris' second academy, the *Schola Cantorum*. Owing to his original and somewhat unconventional style, he soon became the focus of various groups of younger composers, including a group known as *Les Six* (George Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honneger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc and Germaine Taillefaire). This experimental approach to composition also saw Satie find a kindred spirit in a certain Claude Debussy, and the two remained firm friends throughout his lifetime.

Perhaps one of his most famous cabaret songs then, *Je te veux (I want you)*, was composed for the celebrated French *chanteuse* Paulette Darty. With a rather *risqué* (for the time at least) text from Henry Pacory, this last item in my programme was first premiered at the *La Scala* cabaret in Paris in 1903. A *valse chantée (sung waltz)*, there is some debate as to whether it may have been composed earlier in 1987 as a work for solo piano.

With a somewhat repetitive but by no means straight forward melody line, the vocal part showcases Satie's unique compositional style. The piano part, playing a vamp of sumptuously rich chords typical of the French idiom compliments the playful text. With a rather cheeky dynamic marking rarely going above a *mezzo piano* and strategically placed *crescendo* markings throughout the piece, this somewhat sensual waltz perhaps showcases the epitome of French cabaret culture. Indeed, even from the opening bars, it is not difficult to imagine a smoky nightclub, the clinking of glasses and the tinkling of the ivories at one of Paris' *many* fine cabaret establishments.

Je Te Veux:

J'ai compris ta déresse,
Cher amoureux,
Et je cede à tes vœux:
Fais de moi ta maîtresse.
Loin de nous la sagesse,
Plus de tristesse,
J'aspire à l'instant précieux
Où nous serons heuruex,
Je te veux.

Je n'ai pas de regrets,
Et je n'ai qu'une envie:
Près de toi, là, tout près,
Vivre toute ma vie.
Que mon cœur soit le tien
Et ta lèvres la mienne,
Que ton corps soit le mien,
Et que toute ma chair soit tienne.

J'ai compris ta déresse…

Oui, je vois dans tes yeux
La divine promesse
Que ton cœur amoureux
Viens chercher ma caresse.
Enlancés pour toujours,
Brûlés de mêmes flammes,
Dans de rêves d'amours,
Nous échangerons nos deux âmes.

J'ai compris ta déresse…

Text: Henry Pacory

I want you:

I've understood your distress,
Dear lover,
And yield to your desires:
Make of me your mistress.
Let's throw discretion
And sadness to the winds,
I long for the precious moment
When we shall be happy,
I want you.

I've not regrets,
And only one desire:
Close, very close by you,
To live my whole life long.
Let my heart be yours
And your lips mine,
Let your body be mine,
And all of my flesh yours.

I've understood your distress…

Yes, I see in your eyes
The exquisite promise
That your loving heart
Is seeking my caress.
Entwined forever,
Consumed by the same desire,
In dreams of love
We'll exchange our souls.

I've understood your distress…

Translation: Richard Stokes, French Song Companion

Biography:

Originally from the Shetland Isles, Ellen is about to complete an MMus in Vocal Studies at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. Under the careful tutelage of Amanda Roocroft, she has been fortunate enough to represent the conservatoire of many occasions, most notably in their Opera productions and popular VoxBox series. Additionally, she has performed in masterclasses with Yvette Bonner and Rebecca Bottone.

Prior to her time at RBC, she enjoyed a successful career as a classroom music teacher in the preparatory school at The Glasgow Academy, one of Scotland's leading independent schools. She earned her teaching qualification through the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, wherein she studied with Margaret Izatt and later Helen Lawson. She graduated from RCS in 2015. It was through RCS that she earned a place in Les Sirènes Female Chamber Choir; wherein she is proud to have helped them to their 2012 victory in the Choir of the Year competition.

An experienced chorister, Ellen is fortunate to have been a long-standing member of the National Youth Choir of Scotland (NYCoS). Through NYCoS, she has toured extensively across much of Europe and the United States, with concerts ranging from intimate acapella performances to large scale works with orchestras. Also through NYCos, she has performed under the baton of some of the worlds' leading conductors, including Sir Donald Runnicles and Christopher Bell. In 2019, she featured as a soloist on the latest release from NYCoS on the Signum Classics record label, *Cantos Sagrados*.

Making waves in opera, her previous roles include 'Aunt Norris' in Dove's 'Mansfield Park' (RBC Opera Scenes), 'Mrs Grose' in Britten's 'Turn of the Screw' (RBC Opera Scenes) and 'Mrs Northwind' in Dove's 'The Enchanted Pig' (RBC Summer Opera). She recently performed the role of 'Dorothée' in Massenet's 'Cendrillon', and is looking forward to preparing the role of 'The Witch' in Humperdinck's 'Hansel and Gretel' in just a few weeks.

Alongside performing, Ellen is a passionate educator and particularly specialises in enhancing the music learning experience of primary pupils (ages 3-11). She firmly believes in enabling all learners to reach their full musical potential through active and innovative teaching techniques. She has worked extensively with choirs of varying levels, and is particularly proud to have established 'Quoir', Glasgow's first fully inclusive queer choir. Ellen feels both humbled and privileged to be studying at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and is thoroughly looking forward to undertaking further study on their Advanced Postgraduate Diploma programme next year.

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To the piano powerhouse that is Jonathan French – thank you for continually providing myself and my colleagues with your incredible talent and insight into each piece we bring you – even that bothersome Bolcom! I always feel secure in my performances when I have such a strong foundation in your playing.

To our wonderful head of vocal, Paul Wingfield and the vocal department here at RBC – thank you for offering me a place all those (two) years ago and for welcoming me into the Conservatoire. I have continually felt supported, encouraged and able to thrive here, and the opportunities you have offered me have undoubtedly shaped the performer I am continually striving to become. Thank you!

To my good friend Judith, her father Andy and the legend that is her mother, Mary Le Breuilley – my self-proclaimed 'Brummy Mummy'. Having such a loving and welcoming cohort so close, especially whilst I am miles away from home means the absolute world to me. Your continued support, not to mention steady flow of home cooked meals has been such a great comfort since moving down here – thank you! May I come over for dinner this weekend?

To my ever loving and ever supportive Mam – possibly the only member of my family to truly appreciate my music tastes. Much of the songs you sang to my siblings and I when we were 'peerie' were my first experiences of vocal music, and they undoubtedly were the foundations of the musician I am continually striving to become. Of all the wonderful people in my life, it is always you that I am hoping to make most proud.

And finally, thanks to all of you for coming along and letting me share some of my most favourite pieces by some of my most favourite composers. It is truly an honour to perform to such a supportive and encouraging audience. Thank you!

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