

School of Music

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**STUDENT RECITAL SERIES
KATZIN RECITAL HALL
SUNDAY APRIL 23RD, 2017 • 2:30 PM**

Program

Franz Schubert
(1797-1828)

- I. Erbkönig
- II. Gesänge des Harfners Op 12.
 1. Wer sich der Einsamkeit er gibt
 2. Wer nie sein Brod mit Tränen aß
 3. An die Thüren
- III. Wandrers Nachtlied d. 224
- IV. Wandrers Nachtlied d. 768

Songs of Travel

Ralph Vaughan Williams
(1872-1958)

- I. The Vagabond
- II. Let Beauty Awake
- III. The Roadside Fire
- IV. Youth and Love
- V. In Dreams
- VI. The Infinite Shining Heavens
- VII. Whither Shall I Wander
- VIII. Bright is the Ring of Words
- IX. I Have Trod the Upward and the Downward Slope

There will be a 10-minute intermission

Oh Fair to See

Gerald Finzi
(1890-1947)

- I. I say I'll seek her side
- II. Oh Fair to See
- III. 'Tis Time
- IV. As I lay in the early sun
- V. Only the wanderer
- VI. To Joy
- VII. Harvest
- VIII. Since we loved

Out of respect for the performers and those audience members around you, please turn all beepers, cell phones and watches to their silent mode. Thank you.

Program Notes

The recital begins with a set of songs by Franz Schubert (1792-1828) all of which use Goethe's texts as source material. The first song is perhaps one of his best-known pieces, which tells the tale of Goethe's legendary Erlking. The piece features a host of players: the narrator, father, son, and Erlking. Each character has their own musical texture, underscored by the rapid right hand triplets in the piano signifying the horse galloping as the father and son race home.

The next three songs are taken from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters* series of books. The harfner (harper) is a dreary character who wanders in isolation and is pitied by those who see him. These three songs, which the Harfner sings at different points in the long story highlight his isolationist nature. Here, we hear what Schubert imagined they might have sounded like.

The last two pieces in this smattering of German songs are both titled "Wandrer's Nachtlied." Goethe makes the attempt with these poems to express an absolute peace or serenity. In the first piece (d.224) this happens through another being. While the text could lead one to believe that Goethe is referencing God in the poem, the dedication (to Charlotte von Stein) tells us the poem was likely referencing her. At the time the poem was written, they had just begun a relationship. The second version (d. 768), highlights what seems to be a peace that one finds at the end of life, as personified in the quiet of nature at night. The poem was originally scrawled on the wall of a mountain cabin that Goethe was fond of in 1780. He would not return to the cabin again for more than 50 years when he was 83 years old. On the return trip, he accompanied by a park ranger that helped reach the cabin. He remarked that Goethe read the poem still scrawled on the wall, recited the last line aloud, dried his eyes and left. Schubert's settings of these two poems are a mastery of simplicity. Both settings are quite short, and harmonically conservative, yet they still capture the essence of Goethe's text. Sadly, despite sending Goethe many of his settings, Goethe never responded to Schubert, instead preferring Carl Friedrich Zelter's compositions.

Ralph Vaughan-Williams (1872-1958) set most of his *Songs of Travel* in 1904. Aside of the stunning music, much of the genius of the cycle comes from the ordering of the songs. The poetry is from Robert Louis Stevenson's collection of the same name, but Stevenson uses an entirely different order (there are also many other poems not included in Vaughan-Williams set). The way that the songs are ordered in the song cycle creates a single character that moves chronologically from beginning to end. In the opening song, "The Vagabond" we meet a very masculine character the rejects any need for companionship, wealth, or the usual comforts of life. He instead wishes only for the stars above him and the open road below him. This can be heard in the constant walking motion in the left hand of the piano part. "Let Beauty Awake" shows the character's more sensitive side as he revels in the beauty of nature as it shifts at dusk and dawn. Its flowing, lyrical quality is interrupted by a very agitated accompaniment in the third piece "The Roadside Fire." Here it seems the character has met a love interest and is trying to convince her that his lifestyle on the open road can be just as beautiful as any more conventional existence. Eventually we reach the main conflict of the piece in "Youth and Love" when the music shifts from a beautiful lilting love song in the opening before the character is overwhelmed by memories of the open road. If one listens carefully they can thematic material from "The Vagabond" creeping in here. The character eventually chooses to leave. As time passes he is racked with guilt, and haunted in the next piece, "In Dreams." In "The Infinite Shining Heavens" the stars seem to be more dull and less satisfying than he remembers, but at the end as a star falls from the sky to his feet, he does seem to be finding some measure of peace. "Whither Shall I Wander" was written at least two years prior to the bulk of the cycle and offers some resolution to the conflict between a more settled life and that of a vagabond. This doesn't come without a sense of melancholy. "Bright is the Ring of Words" espouses the main theme of the cycle. As the character nears the end of life, he finds some solace in the fact that his songs will live on long past the time he is on this earth. The final piece acts as a bit of a coda to the entire cycle, and the score features instruction for it only to be performed when the cycle is performed in its entirety. The character has come to grips with his death and we hear thematic material from multiple points in the cycle (particularly "Bright is the Ring of Words" and "The Vagabond").

This final piece was only added to the cycle decades later in a 1960, posthumous publication of the work.

Oh Fair to See was published in 1965, after Finzi's death (1890-1947). Finzi had planned many other volumes of songs beyond what was published during his life. These would include at least two sets of Thomas Hardy poetry and two more sets including various poets' work. In his last year of life he wrote many songs, and this left a large portion unpublished at the time of his death. Editors grouped them into four volumes: *I Said to Love, Till Earth Outwears, To a Poet*, and this cycle, *Oh Fair to See*. While this assembly of songs doesn't include a single character that stretches throughout the cycle, there are a number of gems that have been assembled into the collection. The cycle opens with an impassioned flourish in the lone setting of Thomas Hardy's poetry within the cycle. The fourth song, "Only the wanderer" is a setting of Ivor Gurney's poetry. Finzi had long been an advocate of Gurney's poetry and music as Gurney succumbed to the effects of schizophrenia. "Harvest" is a look into the life of a farmer as Edmond Blunden's poetry outlines the emotional journey of a poor harvest. The final piece, "Since we loved" was the last song that he ever wrote. It was completed about a month before his death. It is a beautiful celebration of love written in just 16 measures.

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