

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 28 December 2023
7.30pm

Songs of Antiquity

James Newby baritone
Joseph Middleton piano

Oliver Muxworthy (b.1993)

John Dowland (1563-1626)

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Brian Elias (b.1948)

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Hugo Wolf (1860-1903)

Franz Schubert

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

John Dowland

Oliver Muxworthy

Prologue (2023) *world première*

Flow my tears (pub. 1600) *arranged by Oliver Muxworthy; world première*

Gruppe aus dem Tartarus D583 (1817)

Strophe aus Die Götter Griechenlands D677 (1819)

Ganymed D544 (1817)

I saw a peacock (2020) *world première*

Commissioned by Wigmore Hall

I saw a peacock • Were the bright day •

The angel • [David sings of] Bethsabe •

Would God it were morning • Will you come?

Interval

Belsazar Op. 57 (1840)

Auf ein altes Bild from *Mörike Lieder* (1888)

Fahrt zum Hades D526 (1817)

3 sonetti di Petrarca S270/1 (1842-6)

Pace non trovo (Sonnet No. 104)~

Benedetto sia'l giorno (Sonnet No. 47)

I' vidi in terra angelici costumi (Sonnet No. 123)

In darkness let me dwell (pub. 1610) *arranged by Oliver Muxworthy; world première*

Epilogue (2023) *world première*

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The programme has changed since these programme notes were written.

This programme inspired by the ancient past in fact begins and ends in the present day, with the first performance of **Oliver Muxworthy's** new arrangements of songs composed more than four centuries ago, whose expression of intense grief still sounds utterly fresh and spontaneous. A solo piano *Prologue* and *Epilogue* bookend these outpourings, opening the concert with rippling *pianissimo* and, at its close, receding into an even deeper quiet. **John Dowland** originally composed 'Flow my tears' in 1596 as an instrumental piece entitled 'Lacrymae pavane'. The words – anonymous but possibly by the composer – were added before it was published in 1600 in Dowland's *Second Book of Songs or Ayres*. In both versions it became one of the best-known pieces of the day, and has continued to inspire later composers – not least Britten, who quotes its opening in his viola *Lachrymae*. The recital's final song, meanwhile – 'In darkness let me dwell' – was first published in 1610 by Dowland's son, Robert, as part of an anthology entitled *A Musical Banquet*. Dowland evokes the text's 'hellish jarring sounds' with a setting full of aching dissonances. The harmonic instability continues until the end, as Dowland refuses to soften the cruelty of the death that is his song's inevitable destination.

Tonight's set of Schubert songs were composed between 1817 and 1819 when **Schubert** was still in his early twenties. The selection comprises settings from each of the three poets whom Schubert set more often than any other, each poem inspired by Greek mythology. Goethe's *Ganymed* describes the legendary figure who was carried to heaven at Zeus's command by an eagle; Schubert draws out the poem's exhilarating sense of movement and rapturous celebration of nature. *Fahrt zum Hades* conveys Mayrhofer's vision of the underworld in grandly dramatic fashion: like Dowland, Schubert uses a descending bass line to suggest death's approach. Schiller's verse from *Die Götter Griechenlands* expresses the poet's regret that the glories of ancient Greece are inaccessible to modern man; Schubert evokes this sense of lost paradise through widely spaced piano chords at the start, the grave melody, equivocation between major and minor, and the final, nostalgic return to the song's opening lines.

Brian Elias has written of his long-held ambition to set the anonymous text *I saw a peacock*: though often treated as a nursery rhyme, Elias finds more sinister meanings – 'far from being a happy story, it is extraordinary in its apocalyptic and almost biblical imagery.' He enjoys the text's syntactic trickery, which allows its lines to be interpreted in different ways according to where the non-existent punctuation is

assumed to fall. His setting draws out this ambiguity, repeating small fragments of text and interrupting the vocal line with piano interludes of unpredictable duration and positioning. The piano part's almost continuous semiquaver movement perhaps suggests a peacock constantly spreading out its tail and drawing it in again. Elias accompanies this piece with five further songs whose texts, he writes, all concern 'dreams and visions', whether from the English Renaissance (2 and 4) or the long 19th Century (3, 5 and 6). The third song, 'The Angel', reworks some of the material of the first, appropriately enough given the ambivalence – benign or terrifying? – that Blake's vision shares with that of the title poem. All the even-numbered songs, in Elias's words, 'attempt to evoke a similar atmosphere of dream-like longing'.

In the late 1880s, after years of near-silence, **Wolf** published several large collections of songs, including 53 *Mörike Lieder* in 1889. 'Auf ein altes Bild', composed in April 1888, clothes Mörike's description of the religious painting with modal harmony that gives it a mysterious, other-worldly quality: in the aftermath of this song's creation Wolf described it as 'the crown of my work so far ... there is still a green summery haze shimmering around me'.

For two years from 1837, **Liszt** and his mistress Comtesse Marie d'Agoult lived in Italy, where their second daughter Cosima (Wagner's second wife) was born. The couple immersed themselves in Italian literature, reading Dante and Petrarch; Liszt's passion for the latter produced probably his first songs, these three sonnet settings originally composed for tenor in the mid-1840s. The texts are taken from a collection of 366 poems sometimes entitled *Rime Sparse* ('Scattered rhymes'), which celebrate the poet's love for a woman named Laura whom he encountered at church. *Pace non trovo* is a characteristically elaborate exploration of the contradictory effects of love on the suffering writer; Liszt's setting alternates agitated operatic rhetoric with ecstatic lyricism. *Benedetto sia 'l giorno* is a hymn of praise for the day on which the poet first met Laura: Liszt conveys the poet's sense of love's power to transform everything around it with a setting that makes particularly effective use of the singer's top register. 'I vidi in terra angelici costumi' takes still further the previous song's evocation of love as an exalted spiritual state: Liszt's harmonic alchemy is to the fore, nowhere more so than in the melting modulation that precedes Petrarch's sestet ('Amor! senno!'). Each song includes lengthy and virtuosic piano interludes, and it is not surprising that Liszt transcribed them for solo piano soon after their composition.

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Oliver Muxworthy (b.1993)

Prologue (2023)

John Dowland (1563-1626)

Flow my tears (pub. 1600) arranged by Oliver Muxworthy Anonymous

Flow, my tears, fall from your springs!
Exiled for ever, let me mourn;
Where night's black bird her sad infamy sings,
There let me live forlorn.

Down vain lights, shine you no more!
No nights are dark enough for those
That in despair their lost fortunes deplore.
Light doth but shame disclose.

Never may my woes be relieved,
Since pity is fled;
And tears and sighs and groans my weary days
Of all joys have deprived.

From the highest spire of contentment
My fortune is thrown;
And fear and grief and pain for my deserts
Are my hopes, since hope is gone.

Hark! you shadows that in darkness dwell,
Learn to contemn light.
Happy, happy they that in hell
Feel not the world's despite.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Gruppe aus dem Tartarus D583 (1817) Friedrich Schiller

Scene from Hades

Horch – wie Murmeln des
empörten Meeres,
Wie durch hohler Felsen
Becken weint ein Bach,
Stöhnt dort dumpftief ein
schweres, leeres,
Qualerpresstes Ach!

Hark! – like the angered
ocean's murmuring,
like a brook weeping
through rocky hollows
there rises up, dank and
deep, a heavy, empty
tormented cry!

Schmerz verzerrt
Ihr Gesicht, Verzweiflung
sperret
Ihren Rachen fluchend
auf.
Hohl sind ihre Augen – ihre
Blicke

Pain distorts
their faces, despair
opens
wide their jaws in
imprecation.
Their eyes are hollow –
their gaze

Spähen bang nach des
Cocytus Brücke,
Folgen tränend seinem
Trauerlauf.

fixes fearfully on Cocytus
Bridge,
weeping they follow the
river's doleful course.

Fragen sich einander
ängstlich leise,
Ob noch nicht Vollendung
sei? –
Ewigkeit schwingt über
ihnen Kreise,
Bricht die Sense des Saturns
entzwei.

Anxiously, softly, they ask
each other
if the end is
nigh? –
Eternity sweeps in circles
above them,
breaks Saturn's scythe
asunder.

Strophe aus Die Götter Griechenlands D677 (1819) Friedrich Schiller

Verse from 'The gods of Greece'

Schöne Welt, wo bist du?
Kehre wieder,
Holdes Blütenalter der Natur!
Ach, nur in dem Feenland
der Lieder
Lebt noch deine fabelhafte
Spur.
Ausgestorben trauert das
Gefilde,
Keine Gottheit zeigt sich
meinem Blick,
Ach, von jenem
lebenwarmen Bilde
Blieb der Schatten nur
zurück.

Beautiful world, where are
you? Come again,
fair springtime of nature!
Ah, only in the enchanted
land of song
does your fabled memory
still live on.
The fields, deserted,
mourn,
no god appears before
my eyes,
ah, of all that living
warmth
only the shadows have
remained.

Ganymed D544 (1817)

Johann Wolfgang von
Goethe

Wie im
Morgenglanze
Du rings mich
anglühst,
Frühling, Geliebter!
Mit tausendfacher
Liebeswonne
Sich an mein Herze drängt
Deiner ewigen Wärme
Heilig Gefühl,
Unendliche Schöne!

Dass ich dich fassen möcht'
In diesen Arm!

Ach an deinem Busen
Lieg' ich und schmachte,
Und deine Blumen, dein Gras
Drängen sich an mein Herz.
Du kühlst den brennenden
Durst meines Busens,
Lieblicher Morgenwind!
Ruft drein die
Nachtigall
Liebend nach mir aus dem
Nebeltal.

Ich komm', ich komme!
Ach wohin, wohin?

Hinauf strebt's,
hinauf!
Es schweben die Wolken
Abwärts, die Wolken
Neigen sich der sehnennden
Liebe.
Mir! Mir!
In eurem Schosse
Aufwärts!
Umfangend umfängen!
Aufwärts an deinen Busen,
Allliebender Vater!

Brian Elias (b.1948)

I saw a peacock (2020)

I saw a peacock

Anonymous

I saw a Peacock with a fiery tail
I saw a Blazing Comet drop down hail
I saw a Cloud with ivy circled round
I saw a sturdy Oak creep on along the ground
I saw a Pismire swallow up a Whale

Ganymede

How in the morning
radiance
you glow at me from all
sides,
spring, beloved!
With thousandfold
delights of love,
the sacred feeling
of your eternal warmth
presses against my heart,
beauty without end!

To clasp you
in these arms!

Ah, on your breast
I lie and languish,
and your flowers, your grass
press against my heart.
You cool the burning
thirst of my breast,
sweet morning breeze!
The nightingale calls out
to me
longingly from the misty
valley.

I come, I come!
Where? Ah, where?

Upwards! Upwards I'm
driven!
The clouds float
down, the clouds
bow to yearning
love.
To me! To me!
Enveloped by you
upwards!
Embraced and embracing!
Upwards to your bosom,
all-loving Father!

I saw a raging Sea brim full of Ale
I saw a Venice glass Sixteen foot deep
I saw a well full of men's tears that weep
I saw their eyes all in a flame of fire
I saw a House as big as the Moon and higher
I saw the Sun even in the midst of night
I saw the man that saw this wondrous sight.

Were the bright day

Anonymous

Were the bright day no more to visit us,
Oh, then forever would I hold thee thus,
Naked, enchained, empty of idle fear,
As the first lovers in the garden were.

The angel

William Blake

I dreamt a dream! What can it mean?
And that I was a maiden Queen
Guarded by an angel mild:
Witless woe was ne'er beguiled!

And I wept both night and day,
And he wiped my tears away;
And I wept both day and night.
And hid from him my heart's delight.

So he took his wings and fled;
Then the morn blushed rosy red;
I dried my tears, and armed my fears
With ten thousand shields and spears.

Soon my Angel came again;
I was armed, he came in vain;
For the time of youth was fled,
And grey hairs were on my head.

[David sings of] Bethsabe

George Peele

...May that sweet plain that bears her pleasant weight
Be still enamelled with discoloured flowers;
That precious fount bear sand of purest gold;
And, for the pebble, let the silver streams
That pierce earth's bowels to maintain the source,
Play upon rubies, sapphires, chrysolites;
The brims let be embraced with golden curls
Of moss that sleeps with sound the waters make
For joy to feed the fount with their recourse;
Let all the grass that beautifies her bower
Bear manna every morn instead of dew...

Would God it were morning

Frederic Myers

My God, how many times ere I be dead
Must I the bitterness of dying know?
How often like a corpse upon my bed
 Composer me and surrender me and so
Thro' hateful hours and ill remembered
 Between the twilight and the twilight go
By visions bodyless obscurely led
 Thro' many a wild enormity of woe?
And yet I know not but that this is worst
When with that light, the feeble and the first,
 I start and gaze into the world again,
And gazing find it as of old accurst
And grey and blinded with the stormy burst
 And blank appalling solitude of rain.

Will you come?

Edward Thomas

Will you come?
Will you come
Will you ride
So late
At my side?
O, will you come?

Will you come?
Will you come
If the night
Has a moon,
Full and bright?
O, will you come?

Would you come?
Would you come
If the noon
Gave light
Not the moon?
Beautiful, would you come?

Would you have come?
Would you have come
Without scorning,
Had it been
Still morning?
Beloved, would you have come?

If you come
Haste and come.
Owls have cried;
It grows dark
To ride.
Beloved, beautiful, come!

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Belsatzar Op. 57 (1840) Belshazzar

Heinrich Heine

Die Mitternacht zog näher schon; In stummer Ruh' lag Babylon.	The midnight hour was drawing on; in hushed repose lay Babylon.
Nur oben in des Königs Schloss, Da flackert's, da lärmt des Königs Tross.	But high in the castle of the king, torches flare, the king's men clamour.
Dort oben in dem Königssaal Belsazar hielt sein Königsmahl.	Up there in the royal hall Belshazzar was holding his royal feast.
Die Knechte sassen in schimmernden Reihn, Und leerten die Becher mit funkelndem Wein.	The vassals sat in shimmering rows, and emptied the beakers of glistening wine.
Es klirrten die Becher, es jauchzten die Knecht'; So klang es dem störrigen Könige recht.	The vassals made merry, the goblets rang; noise pleasing to that obdurate king.
Des Königs Wangen leuchten Glut; Im Wein erwuchs ihm kecker Mut.	The king's cheeks glow like coals; his impudence grew as he quaffed the wine.
Und blindlings reisst der Mut ihn fort; Und er lästert die Gottheit mit sündigem Wort.	And arrogance carries him blindly away; and he blasphemes God with sinful words.
Und er brüstet sich frech, und lästert wild; Die Knechtschar ihm Beifall brüllt.	And he brags insolently, blasphemes wildly; the crowd of vassals roar him on.
Der König rief mit stolzem Blick; Der Diener eilt und kehrt zurück.	The king called out with pride in his eyes; the servant hurries out and then returns.
Er trug viel gülden Gerät auf dem Haupt; Das war aus dem Tempel Jehovas geraubt.	He bore many vessels of gold on his head; plundered from Jehovah's temple.
Und der König ergriff mit frevler Hand Einen heiligen Becher, gefüllt bis am Rand.	With impious hand the king grabs a sacred beaker filled to the brim.

Song continues overleaf. Please turn the page as quietly as possible.

Und er leert' ihn hastig bis auf den Grund Und ruft laut mit schäumendem Mund:	And he drains it hastily down to the dregs, and shouts aloud through foaming lips:
Jehova! dir künd' ich auf ewig Hohn, – Ich bin der König von Babylon!	'Jehovah! I offer you eternal scorn – I am the king of Babylon!'
Doch kaum das grause Wort verklang, Dem König ward's heimlich im Busen bang.	Those terrible words had hardly faded, than the king was filled with secret fear.
Das gellende Lachen verstummt zumal; Es wurde leichenstill im Saal.	The shrill laughter was suddenly silent; it became deathly still in the hall.
Und sieh! und sieh! an weisser Wand Da kam's hervor wie Menschenhand;	And see! and see! on the white wall a shape appeared like a human hand;
Und schrieb und schrieb an weisser Wand Buchstaben von Feuer, und schrieb und schwand.	And wrote and wrote on the white wall letters of fire, and wrote and went.
Der König stieren Blicks da sass, Mit schlotternden Knien und totenblass.	The king sat there with staring eyes, with trembling knees and pale as death.
Die Knechtenschar sass kalt durchgraut, Und sass gar still, gab keinen Laut.	The host of vassals sat stricken with horror, and sat quite still, and made no sound.
Die Magier kamen, doch keiner verstand Zu deuten die Flammenschrift an der Wand.	The soothsayers came, not one of them all could interpret the letters of fire on the wall.
Belsazar ward aber in selbiger Nacht Von seinen Knechten umgebracht.	Belshazzar however in that same night was done to death by his own vassals.

Hugo Wolf (1860-1903)

Auf ein altes Bild from *Mörrike Lieder* (1888)

Eduard Mörrike

In grüner Landschaft Sommerflor, Bei kühlem Wasser, Schilf und Rohr, Schau, wie das Knäblein Sündelos Frei spielt auf der Jungfrau Schoss! Und dort im Walde wonesam, Ach, grünet schon des Kreuzes Stamm!	In the summer haze of a green landscape, By cool water, rushes and reeds, See how the Child, born without sin, Plays freely on the Virgin's lap! And there blissfully in the wood The Cross is already, alas, in leaf!
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Franz Schubert

Fahrt zum Hades D526 *Journey to Hades* (1817)

Johann Baptist Mayrhofer

Der Nachen dröhnt, Cypressen flüstern – Horch, Geister reden schaurig drein; Bald werd' ich am Gestad', dem düstern, Weit von der schönen Erde sein.	The boat creaks, cypresses whisper hark, spirits utter their chilling cries; soon I shall reach the gloomy shore, far from the lovely world.
Da leuchten Sonne nicht, noch Sterne, Da tönt kein Lied, da ist kein Freund. Empfang die letzte Träne, o Ferne! Die dieses müde Auge weint.	Neither sun nor stars shine there, no song is heard, no friend is found. O distant earth, accept this last tear shed by my weary eyes.
Schon schau' ich die blassen Danaiden, Den fluchbeladnen Tantalus; Es murmelt todesschwangern Frieden, Vergessenheit, dein alter Fluss.	Already I see the pale Danaiides, and curse-laden Tantalus; your ancient river, O Oblivion, murmurs of death- swollen peace.
Vergessen nenn' ich zwiefach Sterben. Was ich mit höchster Kraft gewann, Verlieren – wieder es erwerben – Wann enden diese Qualen? Wann?	Oblivion to me is a double death. To lose that which needed all my strength to win, and to strive for it once more – when will these torments cease? When?

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

3 sonetti di Petrarca S270/1 (1842-6)

Petrarch

Pace non trovo (Sonnet No. 104) I find no peace

Pace non trovo, e non ho da far guerra,
E temo, e spero, ed ardo, e son un ghiaccio:
E volo sopra 'l cielo, e giaccio in terra;
E nulla stringo, tutto 'l mondo abbraccio.

I find no peace, and am not inclined for war;
and I fear, and I hope, and burn, and am turned to ice,
and I soar in the air, and lie upon the ground;
and I hold nothing, though I embrace the world.

Tal m'ha in prigion, che non m'apre, né serra,
Né per suo mi ritien, né scioglie il laccio,
E non m'accide Amor, e non mi sferra;
Né mi vuol vivo, né mi trahe d'impaccio.

Love has me in a prison, which he neither opens nor locks;
he neither claims me for his own, nor loosens my halter;
and Love neither slays me, nor unshackles me;
he would not have me live, yet he torments me.

Veggio senz'occhi; e non ho lingua e grido;
E bramo di perir, e chieggo aita;
Ed ho in odio me stesso, ed amo altrui:

I see without eyes; and cry without a tongue;
I long to perish, and plead for help;
I hate myself and love another:

Pascomi di dolor; piangendo rido;
Equalmente mi spiace morte e vita.
In questo stato son, Donna, per Voi.

I feed on grief; weeping I laugh;
death, like life, repels me.
You have reduced me, my lady, to this state.

Benedetto sia'l giorno (Sonnet No. 47) Blessed be the day

Benedetto sia 'l giorno, e 'l mese, e l'anno,
E la stagione, e 'l tempo, e l'ora, e 'l punto
E 'l bel paese e 'l loco, ov'io fui giunto
Da' duo begli occhi che legato m'anno;

Blessed be the day, the month, the year,
and the season, and the time, and the hour, and the moment,
and the lovely landscape, and the spot where I was enthralled
by two lovely eyes that have enslaved me.

E benedetto il primo dolce affanno

And blessed be the first sweet pang I suffered,

Ch'i' ebbi ad esser con Amor congiunto,
E l'arco e la saette ond' i' fui punto,
E le piaghe, ch'infino al cor mi vanno.

when Love overwhelmed me,
the bow and the arrows which stung me,
and the wounds which penetrate my heart.

Benedette le voci tante, ch'io
Chiamando il nome di mia Laura ho sparte,
E i sospiri e le lagrime e 'l desio.

Blessed be the many voices that have echoed
when I have called my Laura's name,
and the sighs and the tears, and the longing.

E benedette sian tutte le carte
Ov'io fama le acquisto, e il pensier mio,
Ch'è sol di lei, sì, ch'altra non v'ha parte.

And blessed be all those writings,
in which I have spread her fame, and my thoughts,
which stem from her alone.

I' vidi in terra angelici costumi (Sonnet No. 123)

I beheld on earth angelic grace

I' vidi in terra angelici costumi,
E celesti bellezze al mondo sole;
Tal che di rimembrar mi giova, e dole:
Che quant'io miro, par sogni, ombre, e fumi.

I beheld on earth angelic grace
and heavenly beauty unmatched in this world,
such as rejoice and pain my memory,
which is clouded with dreams, shadows, mists.

E vidi lagrimar que' duo bei lumi,
Ch'han fatto mille volte invidia al sole;
Ed udì sospirando dir parole
Che farian gir i monti, e stare i fiumi.

And I beheld tears spring from those lovely eyes,
which many a time have put the sun to shame.
And I heard words uttered with such sighs,
that mountains would be moved and rivers halted.

Amor! senno! valor, pietate, e doglia
Facean piangendo un più dolce concerto
D'ogni altro, che nel mondo udir si soglia.

Love! wisdom! valour, pity and grief
created in that lament a sweeter concert
than any other to be heard on earth.

Ed era 'l cielo all'armonia s'intento
Che non si vedea in ramo mover foglia.
Tanta dolcezza avea pien l'aer e 'l vento.

And heaven was so intent on that harmony,
that not a leaf was seen to move on the bough;
such sweetness had filled the air and the wind.

Please do not turn the page until the song and its accompaniment have ended.

John Dowland

In darkness let me dwell (pub. 1610)

arranged by Oliver Muxworthy

Anonymous

In darkness let me dwell, the ground shall sorrow be,
The roof despair to bar all cheerful light from me,
The walls of marble black that moist'ned still shall weep,
My music hellish jarring sounds to banish friendly sleep.
Thus wedded to my woes and bedded to my tomb
O, let me living die, till death do come.

Oliver Muxworthy

Epilogue (2023)