

Programme

Handel

Tornami a vagheggiar (Alcina)

Mozart

Vado, ma dove? Oh Dei!, K 583

Bellini

Malinconia, ninfa gentile
Ma rendi pur contento

Grieg

Jeg elsker dig
Solveigs Sang

Rossini

Come tacer – Vorrei spiegarvi il giubilo (La cambiale di matrimonio)

Verdi

Volta la terrea (Un Ballo in Maschera)

Rachmaninov

Vocalise

Traditional arr. Michael Pollock

Y Deryn Pur

Morris

Hei-ho!

Arditi

Il bacio

Jessica Robinson

Welsh Soprano Jessica Robinson graduated from the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama gaining a distinction in MA Opera Performance.

During her time at the RWCMD, Jessica gained a First-Class Honours degree along with the Aneurin Davies memorial award, The Mansel Thomas prize, The Margaret Tann Award, the Elias Soprano award and was the 2016 Prince of Wales Scholar.

As an oratorio and concert soloist, she regularly appears in concerts across the UK as guest artist with many renowned Male Voice Choirs. Internationally, Jessica has performed in New York, China, Switzerland and Italy. Concert highlights include performing with the CBSO in a performance of Vaughan Williams' *Serenade to Music* for Radio 3, Soloist at the Royal Albert Hall for the 1000 Male Voice choir Gala, soprano soloist in Handel's *Messiah* at the Wales Millennium Centre and performing for HRH The Prince of Wales and guests at Buckingham Palace.

Operatic engagements include the Countess *Marriage of Figaro*, Lady Billows *Albert Herring* and Fox *Cunning little Vixen* (RWCMD); Spirit *Dido and Aeneas* (Opera'r Ddraig); Nora *Riders to the Sea* (Bute Park Opera); Worker/Semi Chorus *Gair ar Gnawd* (Welsh National Opera/S4C); Rose *Lakmé*, Rosina *The Barber of Seville* and Despina *Così fan Tutte* (Swansea City Opera); Heavenly voice *Don Carlo* and Tetska *Jenufa* (Grange Park Opera); Spell for Reality *Spell Book*, Siren *La Liberazione di Ruggiero* (Longborough Opera).

After winning the Welsh Singers Competition in October 2022, Jessica will now represent Wales in BBC Cardiff Singer of the World 2023.

Michael Pollock

Michael won a Demyship to read music at Magdalen College, Oxford and after graduating he studied piano accompaniment with Roger Vignoles at the Royal College of Music. For more than twenty years he was a member of the music staff of Welsh National Opera, and since 2009 he has been Consultant Coach for the Harewood Artists at English National Opera; he also does specialist role preparation with such singers as Louise Alder, Dame Sarah Connolly, Rebecca Evans, Claudia Huckle, Gwyn Hughes Jones, Rhian Lois and Natalya Romaniw.

In addition to acting as official accompanist for the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World competition on three occasions, he has given recitals in many parts of the world with singers such as the sopranos Rebecca Evans, Natalya Romaniw, and Dame Kiri Te Kanawa; mezzos Patricia Bardon, Katarina Karnéus and Guang Yang; tenors Gwyn Hughes Jones, Dennis O'Neill, and Adrian Thompson and baritones Neal Davies, Christopher Maltman, Sir Bryn Terfel and Sir Willard White.

His recordings include a disc of English songs with the baritone Anthony Michaels-Moore (in the Rosenblatt recital series), two collections of Italian songs with Rebecca Evans and Nuccia Focile, as well as a CD with Leslie Craven of both clarinet sonatas by Brahms plus the sonata by Nino Rota.

Programme Notes

G F Handel (1685-1759)

Tornami a vagheggiar

Drawn from Handel's 1735 magic-inspired opera *Alcina*, the aria *Tornami a vagheggiar* occurs during the end of the first act and is often sung (though not always) by the character Morgana. In the aria she expresses her love for a nobleman whom she believes to be Ruggiero, unaware that he is his disguised betrothed Bradamante who hopes to rescue him from a spell cast by Morgana's sister Alcina. Nothing is quite as it seems in Handel's 18th century *Love Island*.

W A Mozart (1756-1791)

Vado, ma dove? Oh Dei!, K 583

This aria is one of numerous standalone works for soprano voice and orchestra. Some of these were conceived not for the concert hall, but for performance in operas, usually to replace existing arias. Written in 1791, whilst Mozart was preparing the score for *Così fan tutte*, *Vado, ma dove? Oh Dei!* is the second of two arias written for the soprano Luisa Villeneuve for performance in Martín y Soler's opera *Il burbero di buon cuore*. In the recitative that precedes this aria, Lucilla learns that her husband Giocondo is in debt and is about to be arrested and imprisoned. Distraught, she declares her intention of going to his aid, and in the aria, she asks the god of love to guide her steps.

Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835)

Malinconia, ninfa gentile & Ma rendi pur contento

Vincenzo Bellini's reputation rests solely on his stage works, of which *Norma*, *La Sonnambula* and *I Puritani* remain firm favourites, and which were to lay the foundations of the dramatic masterpieces by Donizetti, Puccini and Verdi. Bellini also contributed numerous songs that have become mainstays of the concert repertoire. Setting words by Ippolito Pindemonte, *Malinconia, ninfa gentile* (Melancholy, gentle nymph) is an agitated song in which the poet welcomes solitude and melancholy. More typical of the composer's prevalence for long flowing lines is *Ma rendi pur contento* (Only make her happy), its extended final phrase capturing the passionate feelings of the lovelorn poet.

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

Jeg elsker dig, Op 5, No 3

Solveigs Sang

Written early in Grieg's career, his Op. 5 group of songs sets words by Hans Christian Andersen and includes the popular *Jeg elsker dig*, (I Love but Thee).

Published in 1865, the song, like others in the group, reveals the composer's love for his wife-to-be Nina in the poet's fervent outpouring. Among Grieg's best-known music, aside from the Piano Concerto, is his incidental music for Henrik Ibsen's play *Peer Gynt*, which was first performed in Christiania in 1876. It was to generate one of Grieg's finest songs – *Solveig's Song* - that would help secure his international acclaim. This poignant song from Act IV, is sung by the central protagonist's ageing sweetheart who has patiently waited his return who, after much searching for fulfilment, discovers that Solveig has been his true love all his life.

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868) **Come tacer - Vorrei spiegarvi il giubilo**

Italian operatic life during the first half of the 19th century was dominated by Gioachino Rossini, whose forty or so stage works established him as the master of the genre. Adored by the age of twenty-one, he was even more popular when he withdrew from writing opera in 1829 with *William Tell*. Rossini's assertion *Give me a shopping list and I'll set it to music*, indicates his natural facility for melody, a gift showcased in *La cambiale di matrimonio* (The Marriage Contract), his first opera written in under a week in 1810. The quality of singers available to Rossini is clear from this aria's coloratura demands.

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943) **Vocalise Op 34, No 14**

Although born in Russia, Sergei Rachmaninov spent much of his life as an exile and after leaving his mother country in 1917 settled in the United States, while living intermittently in Switzerland. Unmoved by modernism, his music was always consciously Russian and embodied a brooding melancholy that seemingly belonged to a previous era. His conservatism found expressive outlet in his deeply felt *Vocalise*, the wordless final song of fourteen written during the summer of 1912. Dedicating the song to Antonina Nezhdanoua, the composer asked, *What need is there of words when you will be able to convey everything better and more expressively than anyone could with words by your voice and interpretation?*

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) **Volta la terrea**

Within Verdi's 1859 opera *Un Ballo in Maschera* (A masked ball), the lowly page Oscar – given to a lyric coloratura soprano - defends the status of Ulrica, a gypsy woman who has been accused of witchcraft by the Governor of Boston. Verdi's opera was based on the assassination of King Gustav III of Sweden in 1792 and consequently much censored before the libretto transferred the location to America.

Traditional arr. Michael Pollock Y Deryn Pur (The Pure Bird)

First published in 1844 in *Ancient National Airs of Gwent and Morganwg* as part of a collection belonging to Maria Jane Williams, the words of Y Deryn Pur have been attributed to Dafydd Nicholas, an 18th Century poet born near Maesteg, Glamorgan.

Haydn Morris (1891-1965) Hei-ho!

Born the son of a coal miner, Haydn Morris showed musical talent early on, and after private teaching won a place at the Royal Academy of Music. Subsequently, his career combined that of a church organist in his native Carmarthenshire, as well as Merthyr Tydfil and Llanelli where he was active as a teacher, adjudicator, conductor, and composer, in this last capacity winning more than 60 prizes at the National Eisteddfod. Among his many works there are operas, cantatas and pieces for piano and orchestra, and not least this delightful song evoking the joys of a nomadic gipsy life.

Luigi Arditi (1822-1903) Il Bacio (The Kiss)

This vocal waltz has become well-known for its appearance during the singing lesson of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, when it was sung by the renowned Italian diva Adelina Patti. A contemporary of Verdi, Arditi was a much-travelled violinist and conductor, securing acclaim in the United States and England where he settled in London from 1858. As a composer he is best known for his operas and songs, of which *Il Bacio* has long been a favourite.

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