

The Cherwell Singers

James Brown *conductor*

Luke Bond *piano*

Stephen Foulkes *baritone*

J. Brahms Zigeunerlieder Op.103

R. Vaughan Williams Five Mystical Songs

C. V. Stanford Songs of the Sea

Sunday, 22nd June 2008
Jacqueline du Pré Music Building

R. Vaughan Williams

Five Mystical Songs (*words by George Herbert*)

1. Easter
2. I got me flowers
3. Love bade me welcome
4. The Call
5. Antiphon

C. V. Stanford

Songs of the Sea (*words by Henry Newbolt*)

1. Drake's Drum
2. Outward Bound
3. Devon, O Devon
4. Homeward Bound
5. The 'Old Superb'

Interval

J. Brahms

Hungarian Dances

- Hungarian Dance no. 3
Hungarian Dance no. 13

Zigeunerlieder, Op. 103 (*words by Hugo Conrat*)

1. He, Zigeuner, greife in die Saiten
2. Hochgetürmte Rimaflut
3. Wißt ihr, wenn mein Kindchen
4. Lieber Gott, du weißt
5. Brauner Bursche führt zum Tanze
6. Röslein dreie in der Reihe
7. Kommt dir manchmal in den Sinn
8. Horch, der Wind klagt in den Zweigen
9. Weit und breit schaut niemand mich an
10. Mond verhüllt sein Angesicht
11. Rote Abendwolken ziehn

Stephen Foulkes *bass*

Stephen Foulkes is a lay clerk in the choir of Wells Cathedral and formerly sang with Bristol Cathedral Choir for ten years. He is a regular soloist with choirs and choral societies throughout the UK, and last sang with the Cherwell Singers at their concert in Exeter College in March.

Luke Bond *piano*

Luke Bond is Organist of Clifton College. Prior to this he held positions as Assistant Director of Music at St Mary's, Warwick and organ scholarships at Gloucester and Truro Cathedrals. In September he takes up the position of Assistant Organist at Truro Cathedral.

James Brown *conductor*

James Brown is Organist of the University Church, Oxford and a lay clerk in the choir of New College with whom he tours to Germany, France, Hungary and Italy later this year. A former organ scholar of Girton College, Cambridge and student at the Conservatoire de Musique, Geneva, he also sings with Collegium Vocale, Ghent (conductor Phillipe Herreweghe).

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) was a late developer, reaching his mid-thirties before attracting serious attention as a composer. His musical style was profoundly influenced by his love of Tudor music and his immensely important work in collecting English folksongs.

The *Five Mystical Songs* were written shortly after Vaughan Williams studied with Ravel for a brief three months. They are settings of poems by George Herbert (1593-1633). The baritone soloist is prominent in the first three of the songs, with the chorus taking a subsidiary role. In the opening song, the lute and its music are used as a metaphor for the poet's emotions at Easter. The second song features a simple but moving melody for the baritone soloist, who is joined by the chorus for the third verse. In the third song the choir can be heard intoning the ancient plainsong antiphon, *O sacrum convivium*. The fourth movement, *The Call*, is for baritone solo. An accompaniment suggestive of pealing bells introduces the triumphant final song of praise, in which the chorus is heard alone to full effect.

Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924) was perhaps the most distinguished of Irish composers. His music shows the influence of Brahms and Schumann, but he was generally unresponsive to more modern musical techniques and movements. While he was Professor of Composition at the Royal College of Music the composers Holst and Vaughan Williams were among his students. As a composer Stanford was particularly respected for his choral works, especially his church music, and for his editions of Irish and other traditional songs.

Stanford wrote several secular works with a nautical theme, among which is the *Songs of the Sea*. These songs, based on poems by the poet-laureate, Sir Henry Newbolt, capture something of the patriotic spirit of Edwardian Britain, and the very nostalgic quality of this sentiment. They were not written originally as a group; it was the enthusiasm of the singer Plunket Greene for the first two, *Devon*, *O Devon* and *Outward Bound*, which encouraged Stanford to request further poems from Newbolt. *The 'Old Superb'* followed, and when Plunket Greene requested even more the result was *Drake's Drum* and *Homeward Bound*. The songs *Drake's Drum* and *Devon, O Devon* refer to the life of Sir Francis Drake, and *The 'Old Superb'* refers to Nelson's chase of the French fleet back and forth across the Atlantic in the lead-up to Trafalgar.

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) was interested in the passionate and intense music of the gypsy idiom. This interest found its way into many of his works, especially the *Hungarian Dances* (a set of 21 piano duets, some of which were transcribed for solo piano, and a few for orchestra) and the *Zigeunerlieder* (Gypsy Songs).

In his *Hungarian Dances*, Brahms aims at stylizing the spirit and idiom of the national airs in the traditional form of the concert piece. In a way, they are the antithesis of Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies*, which attempt to translate the colour and texture of a Gypsy band in terms of piano technique. In Liszt's method, being the more superficial, we naturally find little trace of the Hungarian idiom except in his professedly Hungarian music. Brahms, however, absorbed the Hungarian spirit, and translated it into his own musical vocabulary.

Musically, the most interesting example of Hungarian influence on Brahms is the *Zigeunerlieder*, which are settings of Hungarian folk songs translated into German by his friend Hugo Conrat. In Brahms's later period of creative output, he is no longer so naively wedded to the folk song melodies, and there are many little traits in his more elaborate songs which show how completely he had adapted the language of the folk song. In the *Zigeunerlieder*, written around 1887, Brahms captured the spirit of Hungarian folk music without copying it; instead of quoting or writing an imitation of Hungarian music, Brahms steeped himself in Hungarian feeling. That this approach was quite deliberate can be clearly seen in a comparison between the earlier *Hungarian Dances* and the *Zigeunerlieder*. Although the former are more overtly Hungarian in character, the latter are more imbued with the true Hungarian spirit. This subtlety could only have been achieved by the mature Brahms, who had spent his whole creative life in contact with Hungarian music and musicians.

The *Zigeunerlieder* are mostly about flirting and love, and rejection and parting; in the singing and accompaniment, one can visualize the colours and the twirling skirts and hear the intricate sounds of energetic violins and cimbaloms. Brahms's mastery of counterpoint adds to the excitement of many of the eleven songs. Only towards the end does he slow down briefly for some reflections on parting and love.

J. Brahms - Zigeunerlieder

1. He, Zigeuner, greife in die Saiten

Hey, Gypsy, strike up the violin!
Play the song of the unfaithful girl!
Let the strings weep and lament,
Until burning tears wet my cheek!

2. Hochgetürmte Rimaflut

High-flooded river Rima, how murky you are,
On the bank I lament loudly for you, my love!
The waves dash by, rumbling up to me on the shore;
On the banks of the Rima let me weep for her forever!

3. Wißt ihr, wenn mein Kindchen

Do you know when my darling is most beautiful?
When her sweet little mouth jokes and laughs and kisses.
Darling, you are mine, passionately I kiss you,
Loving heaven created you just for me!

Do you know when I like my sweetheart best?
When he holds me close in his arms.
Darling, you are mine, passionately I kiss you,
Loving heaven created you just for me!

4. Lieber Gott, du weißt

Dear God, you know how often I've regretted
That I once gave a kiss to my sweetheart.
My heart commanded that I should kiss him;
I will think of that first kiss as long as I live.

Dear God, you know how often, in the still of night,
I've thought of my dearest in joy and sadness.
Love is sweet, even though remorse is bitter;
My poor heart will remain true to him for ever.

5. Brauner Bursche führt zum Tanze

A sun-tanned lad leads his beautiful blue-eyed lass to the dance.
Boldly he strikes his spurs together; the csárdás music begins.
He kisses and hugs his sweetheart, turns her, leads her, shouts and leaps;
And throws three shining silver coins into the cimbalom to make it jingle.

6. Röslein dreie in der Reihe

Three red roses blossom in a row;
A lad's allowed to visit his lass!
Dear God, if that were forbidden
This lovely world would not last long;
To stay single is a sin!

The finest town in the plain is Kecskemét;
There are lots of pretty, pleasant girls!
Friends, find yourself a bride there,
Ask for her hand and set up home,
Drain the cup of joy!

7. *Kommt dir manchmal in den Sinn*

Do you ever recall, my sweetheart, what you solemnly promised me?
Do not deceive me or leave me; you don't know how much I love you.
Love me as I love you, and God's grace will shine on you!

8. *Horch, der Wind klagt in den Zweigen*

Listen, the wind sighs sadly in the branches;
Darling, we must part: good night.
I would love to rest in your arms,
But it is time to part; may God protect you.

The night is dark, no star shines;
Darling, trust in God and do not cry.
If God brings me back to you some day,
We shall be united in blissful love forever.

9. *Weit und breit schaut niemand mich an*

Far and wide no one notices me;
And if they hate me, what do I care?
As long as my darling loves me always,
kisses me, embraces, and caresses me forever.

No star shines in the dark night,
No flower smiles at me in fragrant glory.
Your eyes are my flowers and starlight,
Shining so kindly on me, blooming for me alone.

10. *Mond verhüllt sein Angesicht*

The moon hides her face.
Sweet love, I am not angry with you.
If I were to be angry, and sadden you,
Tell me, how then could I love you?
My heart burns for you,
But my tongue doesn't admit it to you:
Now intoxicated by love,
Now gently intimate, like a dove.

11. *Rote Abendwolken ziehn*

Red evening clouds fly above,
My heart burns with longing for you, my darling.
The sky is radiant in glowing splendour,
And I dream day and night only of my sweetheart.

The Cherwell Singers

Soprano

Sue Bignal
Abigail Bradfield
Kipper Chipperfield
Eleanor Parker
Beatrix Stewart

Alto

Virginia Allport
Katherine Butler
Jo McLean
Helen Maidlow
Lizzy Newton
Sally Prime

Tenor

Alex Clissold-Jones
Paul King
Tim Nixon
Guy Peskett
David Sutton

Bass

Neil Herington
Paul Hodges
Simon Jones
Iain McLean
Tim Wainwright

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www.cherwellsingers.org