



James Newby Joseph Middleton

The Venue, Leeds Conservatoire
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Leeds
Song

Programme

James Newby, Baritone
Joseph Middleton, Piano

Franz Schubert 1797-1828

Der Strom
Auf der Donau
Der Wanderer
Gruppe aus dem Tartarus
An die Freunde
Prometheus
Freiwilliges Versinken
Aus 'Heliopolis' I
Der Wanderer an den Mond
Fischerweise

Interval

Benjamin Britten 1913-1976

Songs and Proverbs of William Blake

Proverb I
London
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A Poison Tree
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The Tyger
Proverb V
The Fly
Proverb VI
Ah, Sun-flower
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Every Night and every Morn

Texts and Translations

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Der Strom

Mein Leben wälzt sich murrend fort,
Es steigt und fällt in krausen Wogen,
Hier bäumt es sich, jagt nieder dort
In wilde Zügen, hohen Bogen.

Das stille Tal, das grüne Feld
Durchrauscht es nun mit leisem Beben,
Sich Ruh' ersehnd, ruhige Welt,
Ergötzt es sich am ruhigen Leben.

Doch nimmer findend, was es sucht,
Und immer sehndend tost es weiter,
Unmutig rollt's auf steter Flucht,
Wird nimmer froh, wird nimmer heiter

Auf der Donau

Auf der Wellen Spiegel schwimmt der Kahn,
Alte Burgen ragen himmelan,
Tannenwälder rauschen geistergleich,
Und das Herz im Busen wird uns weich.

Denn der Menschen Werke sinken all',
Wo ist Turm, wo Pforte, wo der Wall,
Wo sie selbst, die Starken, erzgeschirmt,
Die in Krieg und Jagden hingestürzt?

Trauriges Gestrüppe wuchert fort,
Während frommer Sage Kraft verdorrt:
Und im kleinen Kahne wird uns bang,
Wellen drohn wie Zeiten Untergang.

Johann Mayrhofer (1787-1836)

Der Wanderer

Wie deutlich des Mondes Licht
Zu mir spricht,
Mich beseelend zu der Reise:
„Folge treu dem alten Gleise,
Wähle keine Heimat nicht.
Ew'ge Plage
Bringen sonst die schweren Tage;
Fort zu ändern
Sollst du wechseln, sollst du wandern,
Leicht entfliehend jeder Klage.“

Sanfte Ebb' und hohe Flut,
Tief im Mut,
Wandr' ich so im Dunkeln weiter,
Steige mutig, singe heiter,
Und die Welt erscheint mir gut.
Alles reine
Seh' ich mild im Widerscheine,
Nichts verworren
In des Tages Glut verdorren:
Froh umgeben, doch alleine.

Friedrich von Schlegel (1772-1829)

The river

My life rolls on its grumbling way
There are highs and lows in curling waves,
It rises up, then falls again,
Wild spurts and soaring curves.

It ripples trembling quietly,
Through peaceful valleys and green fields
Searching for rest, a peaceful world,
Delighting in a life of calm.

But never finding what it seeks,
It surges onwards, forever yearning,
Discontented, it rolls on in endless flight,
Never happy, never serene.

On the Danube

The little boat floats on the mirroring waves,
Old castles tower above it,
Pine forests rustle like spirits,
And our hearts grow faint within our breasts.

For the works of man all perish,
Where is the tower, the gate, the rampart,
Where are the mighty themselves, in their bronze armour,
Who stormed forth to battle and the chase!

Sad weeds now thrive here,
While the power of pious myths fails
And we in our little boat are afraid,
Like time, waves threaten our doom.

The Traveller

How clearly the moonlight
Speaks to me,
Giving me courage for the journey,
"Keep faithfully to the old path,
Don't chose anywhere as home
Lest bad times
Bring endless difficult days;
Move onwards,
Welcome change, travel to new places,
Lightly casting off all grief."

With gentle ebb and high flood,
Deep within my soul
I wander on in the darkness,
I climb boldly, sing lustily,
And the whole world looks good to me.
I see everything clearly,
In its gentle reflections,
Nothing is blurred
Or wilted in the heat of the day;
I am surrounded by joy, but alone.

Please turn the page quietly once the song has finished

Gruppe aus dem Tartarus

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

Schmerz verzerret
Ihr Gesicht—Verzweiflung sperret
Ihren Rachen fluchend auf.
Hohl sind ihre Augen—ihre Blicke
Spähen bang nach des Cocytus Brücke,
Folgen tränend seinem Trauerlauf.

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

Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805)

An die Freunde

Im Wald, im Wald da grabt mich ein,
Ganz stille, ohne Kreuz und Stein:
Denn was ihr türmet, überschneit
Und überwindet Winterszeit.

Und wann die Erde sich verjüngt
Und Blumen meinem Hügel bringt,
Das freut euch, Guten, freuet euch!
Dies alles ist dem Toten gleich.

Doch nein, denn eure Liebe spannt
Die Äste in das Geisterland,
Und die euch führt zu meinem Grab,
Zieht mich gewaltiger herab.

Johann Mayrhofer (1787-1836)

Group from Tartarus

Listen! Like the angry murmuring of the sea,
Or a brook weeping through pools in hollow rocks,
From the depths arises a muffled, heavy,
Empty and tormented groan,

Pain distorts
Their faces — despair
Opens wide their cursing mouths.
Their eyes are hollow — their gaze
Strains terrified towards Cocytus' bridge,
Following that river's mournful course, weeping.

Anxiously, they ask one another quietly
If the end is yet nigh?
Eternity sweeps in circles above them,
Breaking Saturn's scythe in two.

To my Friends

Bury me in the woods, in the woods,
Very quietly, without cross or tombstone,
For whatever you build
Will be covered over with snow in Winter storms.

And when the earth grows young again
And brings flowers to my grave,
Rejoice, dear friends, rejoice!
It all means nothing to the dead.

But no, for your love reaches out
Its branches into the spirit world,
And as it draws you to my grave,
It draws me more strongly down.

Please turn the page quietly once the song has finished

Prometheus

Bedecke deinen Himmel, Zeus,
Mit Wolkendunst
Und übe, dem Knaben gleich,
Der Disteln köpft,
An Eichen dich und Bergeshöh'n;
Mußt mir meine Erde
Doch lassen stehn
Und meine Hütte, die du nicht gebaut,
Und meines Herd,
Um dessen Glut
Du mich beneidest.

Ich kenne nichts Ärmeres
Unter der Sonn', als euch, Götter!
Ihr nähret kümmerlich
Von Opfersteuern
Und Gebetshauch
Eure Majestät,
Und darbtet, wären
Nicht Kinder und Bettler
Hoffnungsvolle Toren.

Da ich ein Kind war
Nicht wußte, wo aus noch ein,
Kehrt' ich mein verirrtes Auge
Zur Sonne, als wenn drüber wär'
Ein Ohr, zu hören meine Klage,
Ein Herz wie meins,
Sich des Bedrängten zu erbarmen.

Wer half mir
Wider der Titanen Übermut?
Wer rettete vom Tode mich,
Von Sklaverei?
Hast du nicht alles selbst vollendet
Heilig glühend Herz?
Und glühtest jung und gut,
Betrogen, Rettungsdank
Dem Schlafenden da droben?

Ich dich ehren? Wofür?
Hast du die Schmerzen gelindert
Je des Beladenen?
Hast du die Tränen gestillet
Je des Geängsteten?
Hat nicht mich zum Manne geschmiedet
Die allmächtige Zeit
Und das ewige Schicksal,
Meine Herrn und deine?

Wähntest du etwa,
Ich sollte das Leben hassen,
In Wüsten fliehen,
Weil nicht alle
Blümenträume reifen?

Hier sitz' ich, forme Menschen
Nach meinem Bilde.
Ein Geschlecht, das mir gleich sei,
Zu leiden, zu weinen,
Zu genießen und zu freuen sich,
Und dein nicht zu achten,
Wie ich!

Freiwilliges Versinken

Wohin, o Helios? In kühlen Fluten
Will ich den Flammenleib versenken,
Gewiss im Innern, neue Gluten
Der Erde Feuerreich zu schenken.

Ich nehme nicht, ich pflege nur zu geben;
Und wie verschwenderisch mein Leben,
Umhüllt mein Scheiden gold'ne Pracht,
Ich scheide herrlich, naht die Nacht.

Wie blass der Mond, wie matt die Sterne!
Solang ich kräftig mich bewege;
Erst wenn ich auf die Berge meine Krone lege,
Gewinnen sie an Mut und Kraft in weiter Ferne.

Prometheus

Cover your heavens, Zeus,
With vaporous clouds,
And try out, like a boy
Knocking the heads off thistles,
Your strength against oak trees and mountain-tops;
But my earth you must
Leave standing,
And my hut, which you didn't build,
And my hearth,
For whose warm glow
You envy me.

I don't know anything poorer
Under the sun, than you Gods!
Wretchedly you feed
Your majesty
On sacrificial offerings
And the breath of prayers.
And would starve
If children and beggars
Were not such hopeful fools.

When I was a child,
And didn't know which way to turn,
I would raise my misguided eyes
To the sun, as if above it
There dwelled an ear to listen to my complaints,
A heart like mine,
That would have pity on my anguish.

Who helped me
Against the arrogance of the Titans?
Who rescued me from death,
From slavery?
Did you not manage this all yourself,
My holy, glowing heart?
And in your youth and goodness, did you not,
Mistakenly, send glowing thanks
To the Sleeper above?

I, honour you? Why?
Did you ease the anguish
Of the sufferer?
Did you ever dry the tears
Of the terrified one?
Was I not forged into a man
By almighty Time
And everlasting Destiny,
My masters and yours?

Did you perhaps think
I would hate life,
And flee into the wilderness,
Because not all
My childhood dreams came to fruition?

Here I sit, making men
In my own image,
A race that will resemble me,
That will suffer, weep,
Know joy and delight,
And to pay no attention to you,
Like me!

Free Fall

Where to, oh sun? I want to immerse
My burning body in cool waters,
Certain in myself, that I can give
New warmth to the earth's fires.

I take nothing, I usually only give;
And however spendthrift my life is,
Golden splendour will surround my parting,
I will depart in glory as night approaches.

How pale the moon is, how dull the stars!
As long as I can move powerfully;
Only when I lay my crown on the mountain,
Will they gain in courage and strength in the far distance.

Please turn the page quietly once the song has finished

Aus 'Heliopolis' II

Fels auf Felsen hingewälzet,
Fester Grund und treuer Halt;
Wasserfälle, Windesschauer,
Unbegriffene Gewalt.

Einsam auf Gebirges Zinne,
Kloster wie auch Burgruine,
Grab' sie der Erinnerung ein!
Denn der Dichter lebt vom Sein.

Atme du den heil'gen Äther
Schling die Arme um die Welt,
Nur dem Würdigen, dem Grossen
Bleibe mutig zugesellt.

Lass die Leidenschaften sausen
Im metallenen Akkord,
Wenn die starken Stürme brausen,
Findest du das rechte Wort.

Johann Mayrhofer (1787-1836)

Der Wanderer an den Mond

Ich auf der Erd', am Himmel du,
Wir wandern beide rüstig zu:
Ich ernst und trüb, du mild und rein,
Was mag der Unterschied wohl sein?

Ich wandre fremd von Land zu Land,
So heimatlos, so unbekannt;
Bergauf, bergab, Wald ein, Wald aus,
Doch bin ich nirgend, ach! zu Haus.

Du aber wanderst auf und ab
Aus Ostens Wieg' in Westens Grab,
Wallst Länder ein und Länder aus,
Und bist doch, wo du bist, zu Haus.

Der Himmel, endlos ausgespannt,
Ist dein geliebtes Heimatland:
O glücklich, wer, wohin er geht,
Doch auf der Heimat Boden steht!

Johann Gabriel Seidl (1804-1875)

Fischerweise

Den Fischer fechten Sorgen
Und Gram und Leid nicht an;
Er löst am frühen Morgen
Mit leichtem Sinn den Kahn.

Da lagert rings noch Friede
Auf Wald und Flur und Bach,
Er ruft mit seinem Liede
Die gold'ne Sonne wach.

Er singt zu seinem Werke
Aus voller frischer Brust,
Die Arbeit gibt ihm Stärke,
Die Stärke Lebenslust.

Bald wird ein bunt' Gewimmel
In allen Tiefen laut
Und plätschert durch den Himmel,
Der sich im Wasser baut.

Doch wer ein Netz will stellen,
Braucht Augen klar und gut,
Muß heiter gleich den Wellen
Und frei sein wie die Flut.

Dort angelt auf der Brücke
Die Hirtin, Schlauer Wicht,
Gib auf nur deiner Tücke,
Den Fisch betrügst du nicht!

Franz Xaver von Schlechta (1796-1875)

From 'Heliopolis' II

Rock piled upon rock,
Firm ground and steady foothold;
Waterfalls, gusts of wind,
Incomprehensible power.

Solitary, on the mountain peak,
Stand a monastery and a ruined castle;
Fix them in the memory,
For the poet lives through existence.

Breathe the holy ether,
Fling your arms around the world;
Boldly consort
With only the worthy and the great.

Let your passions seethe
In brazen harmony.
When fierce tempests rage
You will find the right word.

The traveller speaks to the moon

I here on earth, you up in the sky,
We are both journeying briskly;
I am serious and sad, you are gentle and pure.
What can be the difference?

I wander as a stranger from place to place,
Homeless and unknown;
Up and down mountains, in and out of forests,
But alas, at home nowhere.

But you journey up and down
From cradle in the East to grave in the West,
Wander, a pilgrim, from country to country,
Yet wherever you are, you are at home.

The endless expanse of the heavens
Is your beloved homeland;
Oh happy is he, who, wherever he goes,
Stands on his native soil.

Fisherman's song

The fisherman does not suffer
From worries, grief and sorrow;
Early in the morning,
He unties his boat with a light heart.

Peace still lingers
Over the forest, meadows and streams,
With his song
He awakens the golden sun.

While at his work
He sings lustily,
His work gives him strength,
And strength a strong zest for life.

Suddenly a colourful throng
Is heard deep in the depths
Splashing through the sky,
Reflected in the water

But he who wants to cast his nets
Must have good clear vision,
Has to be cheerful like the waves
And as free as the tide.

Over there on the bridge
The sly shepherdess is fishing,
Just give up your tricks,
You won't catch this fish!

Please turn the page quietly once the song has finished

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Songs and Proverbs of William Blake (1757-1827)

Proverb I

The pride of the peacock is the glory of God.
The lust of the goat is the bounty of God.
The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God.
The nakedness of woman is the work of God.

London

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
Every black'ning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls.

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlot's curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

Proverb II

Prisons are built with stones of Law,
Brothels with bricks of Religion

The Chimney Sweeper

A little black thing among the snow,
Crying 'weep 'weep in notes of woe!
Where are thy father and mother? say?
They are both gone up to the church to pray.

Because I was happy upon the heath,
And smil'd among the winter's snow
They clothed me in the clothes of death,
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

And because I am happy and dance and sing
They think they have done me no injury,
And are gone to praise God and his Priest and King
Who make up a heaven of our misery.

Proverb III

The bird a nest, the spider a web, man friendship

A Poison Tree

I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I water'd it in fears,
Night and morning with my tears;
And I sunned it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night,
Till it bore an apple bright.
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine.

And into my garden stole
When the night had veil'd the pole,
In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretch'd beneath the tree.

Proverb IV

Think in the morning. Act in the noon.
Eat in the evening. Sleep in the night.

The Tyger

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, and what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? and what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears,
And water'd heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

Proverb V

The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction.
If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise.
If others had not been foolish, we should be so.

The Fly

Little Fly,
Thy summer's play
My thoughtless hand
Has brush'd away.

Am not I
A fly like thee?
Or art not thou
A man like me?

For I dance
And drink and sing:
Till some blind hand
Shall brush my wing.

If thought is life
And strength and breath
And the want
Of thought is death;.

Then am I
A happy fly,
If I live,
Or if I die.

Please turn the page quietly once the song has finished

Proverb VI

The hours of folly are measur'd by the clock; but of wisdom,
no clock can measure.
The busy bee has no time for sorrow.
Eternity is in love with the productions of time.

Ah, Sunflower

Ah, Sun-flower! weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the Sun;
Seeking after that sweet golden clime,
Where the traveller's journey is done:

Where the Youth pined away with desire,
And the pale Virgin shrouded in snow,
Arise from their graves and aspire
Where my Sun-flower wishes to go.

Proverb VII

To see a World in a Grain of Sand,
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour.

Every Night and Every Morn

Every Night and every Morn
Some to Misery are Born.
Every Morn and every Night
Some are Born to sweet delight.
Some are Born to sweet delight,
Some are Born to Endless Night.
We are led to Believe a Lie
When we see not Thro' the Eye,
Which was Born in a Night, to perish in a Night,
When the Soul Slept in Beams of Light.
God Appears and God is Light
To those poor Souls who dwell in Night,
But does a Human Form Display
To those who Dwell in Realms of Day.

Programme Notes

'Der Strom' is a setting of a poem with uncertain authorship; it may be by Anton Stadler, the song's dedicatee, or by Anton Ottenwalt, and one 19th-century publication even suggested it was by Schubert himself. The song was only published in 1876, on Brahms's recommendation. The rising and falling stream is also the poet's life, mirrored in the relentlessly stormy text of the piano writing and the dramatically angular vocal line. From D minor, the song modulates to F sharp minor at the start of the last stanza ('Doch immer findend ...'), and the short postlude rapidly goes through a series of modulations that suggests the constant motion of the stream. The Danube is a much smoother river, but as the singer floats gently along in 'Auf der Donau' he muses on mutability, one of the great themes of European literature. Where are the armoured inhabitants of the castle now? The song opens in a peaceful E flat major, but as all things perish at the second stanza, the texture changes (trills in the bass, a more broken vocal line, and a more staccato piano part) and we start to modulate, reaching an ironic F sharp minor at 'Starken' (mighty). The opening music then returns after a dramatic silence, but still in F sharp minor where song ends in syncopations as uncertain as the poetry.

The singer's question 'Wo?' (where) is asked again in 'Der Wanderer'. He seeks Housman's 'land of lost content', only to be told in the final line that he will never find it. The passage at the second stanza ('Die Sonne dünkt mich hier so kalt') was used by Schubert as the basis of the Adagio section of his 'Wanderer' fantasy for piano. A change of mood at the third stanza, in E major, suggests optimism, but it fades into the minor key before attempting even more optimism in the rustic 6/8 at 'Das Land, so Hoffnungsgrün' – and again fades into a return to the opening music. The major key is not a consolation here. 'Gruppe aus dem Tartarus' offers even less. Schiller's poem draws on Virgil's description in the Aeneid of Aeneas's visit to the underworld. Tartarus is reserved for the worst tortures in Hades, and the river Cocytus flows round it, 'sliding in dark coils' (Schiller describes a bridge over it which is not

in Virgil). This through-composed operatic song repeatedly attempts to climb up by chromatic degrees, but in the end the music sinks back down, defeated.

'An die Freunde' looks ahead to the poet's death – not an uncommon topic, but Mayrhofer did in fact commit suicide. The quiet walking bass of the piano at the opening is the only accompaniment to the first stanza. At the second, when friends bring flowers to the grave, the key changes from A minor to A major and there is some expressive harmony. The walking bass motif returns for the final stanza, which is repeated. Here the piano part draws the music down to the grave.

With 'Prometheus' we have another topic from classical mythology, and one also treated operatically by Schubert. Goethe's poem is in free verse, and Schubert matches this, creating an almost improvised dramatic monologue. The opening section is in effect an orchestral recitative, with free rhythms from the voice interrupted by dramatic dotted rhythms from the piano. The final stanza, in a defiant C major punctuated with dotted rhythms imitating the sound of a smithy, promises that Prometheus will create a race of men like him. In 'Freiwilliges Versinken' the poet asks the sun (Helios in Greek mythology) where he is going, and Helios describes his journey into the sunset. The singer has to negotiate some very wide, angular intervals, especially at 'ich Scheide herrlich' and 'meine Krone lege'. The final bars rise up to the highest notes of the song as the moon rises. Helios is also present in 'Aus Heliopolis (1)', the first of two 'Heliopolis' poems by Mayrhofer. The cold unison of E minor at the start gradually warms to E major with the flower chosen by Helios and his message of hope.

From the sun we turn to the moon in 'Der Wanderer an den Mond'. Here Schubert writes what could be taken for a folk song, with simple harmony, a memorable vocal line, and a simple but very effective evocation of the wandering poet. When he thinks of the moon being at home wherever he is, the music moves from minor to major, where it remains equally at

home. 'Fischerweise' evokes the world of Schumann's 'merry peasant', with another folk-like melody over a cheerful piano accompaniment. His light-hearted mood is matched by a repeated phrase in a higher register marked 'leise' (softly, or gently). Seeing himself as the fish the shepherdess is trying to catch, he is confident he won't be caught, and the music reinforces this idea – but perhaps he will.

Britten wrote his *Songs and Proverbs of William Blake* in 1965, setting words by William Blake chosen by Peter Pears, selected from Blake's *Songs of Experience*, *Auguries of Innocence* and *Proverbs of Hell*. He had previously set Blake's poetry in his *Serenade*, *Spring Symphony* and *A Charm of Lullabies*. It was first performed that year at Aldeburgh by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and recorded soon after. The cycle is structured around material for the 'Proverbs' that returns in different forms. The Proverbs are distinctive because they feature the independence of voice from piano to the extent that their lines are not fully synchronized, and they also use 12-tone techniques (Britten had already used this method in his opera *The Turn of the Screw*). The cycle uses the tension between diatonic and chromatic writing to symbolize the tension between innocence and experience that pervades Blake's poetry. 'London' and 'Every Night and every Morn' begin and end the cycle, and both use an ambiguous chromaticism. Simpler tonalities express the natural world in 'The Tyger' or 'The Fly', while 'A Poison Tree' uses simple major and minor triads within a chromatic context to represent corruption (also as in *The Turn of the Screw*). The overlapping rhythms of the piano part in 'London' conjure up the poet's wandering 'thro' each chartered street'. The last song, 'Every Night and Every Morn', ends with a major triad representing God appearing in human form 'To those who Dwell in Realms of Day'.

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James Newby

Baritone

James Newby is a former BBC New Generation Artist, Rising Star for the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, a Borletti Buitoni Trust Award Winner and a European Concert Hall Organisation Rising Star.

He won the Richard Tauber Prize for best interpretation of a Schubert Lied at the 2015 Wigmore Hall/Kohn International Song Competition and enjoys a close relationship with the Hall. Recent appearances include Mahler's *Rückert-Lieder* in 2023 with Mitsuko Uchida; *Die schöne Müllerin* with Simon Lepper; and a mixed programme of Dowland, Schubert, Wolf and Liszt with Joseph Middleton.

Highlights of the 2025–26 season include Count Almaviva (*Le nozze di Figaro*) with the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century, followed by a fully staged production for Opera North in Leeds. James makes his Grange Park Opera debut and role debut as Figaro (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*).

James was a member of the Ensemble of the Staatsoper Hannover (2019–22), where his roles included Eddy (*Greek*) by Mark-Anthony Turnage, Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*) and the title role in *Eugene Onegin*.

He has since appeared at Opéra national du Rhin, Theater an der Wien, Komische Oper Berlin, Garsington Opera and Opera North in roles including Guglielmo and Demetrius (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*). He also returned to Hannover, as a guest, for *Eugene Onegin*. James has appeared with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and has performed baroque repertoire with David Bates, Jonathan Cohen and John Butt.

Other concert highlights include a new commission for baritone by Michael Zev Gordon

with the Britten Sinfonia, The Poet in Otto Ketting's *Ithaka Symphony* with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, and, in addition to his regular appearances at Wigmore Hall, recitals at the Oxford International Song Festival, Leeds Song and the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam.

His 2020 debut solo album *I Wonder as I Wander* (BIS) with Joseph Middleton was awarded the *Diapason d'Or Découverte*.



Joseph Middleton

Piano

Joseph Middleton is widely regarded as one of the most exceptional and creative pianists of his generation, specialising in song accompaniment and chamber music at the highest international level. Hailed by *Gramophone* as “the absolute king of programming” and by *The New York Times* as “the perfect accompanist”, he collaborates with many of the world’s foremost singers, performing at venues and festivals across Europe, North America and Asia.

A passionate advocate for the power of song, Joseph is the Artistic Director of Leeds Song, praised by *The Guardian* for its “world-class” programming and by *The Times* as a “Northern powerhouse of song”. He also curates series for BBC Radio 3, Wigmore Hall and the University of Cambridge, where he founded and directs their Lieder Scheme. Joseph is Musician in Residence at Pembroke College. He is a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music, where he is Professor of Ensemble Piano, and was made a Bye-Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge by Lord Chris Smith. Joseph is the first — and to date, only — accompanist to receive the Royal Philharmonic Society’s Young Artist Award, the UK’s most prestigious recognition for a classical musician.

Joseph appears regularly at leading international venues including Wigmore Hall, where he has been a featured artist with series on Ravel, Mahler and Strauss; the Royal Opera House, the Barbican and Southbank Centre; Alice Tully Hall and the Park Avenue Armory in New York; the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam; Vienna Konzerthaus and Musikverein; Hamburg Elbphilharmonie; Berlin Pierre Boulez Saal and Philharmonie; Cologne Philharmonie; Madrid’s Teatro de la Zarzuela; Baden-Baden Festspielhaus; Zurich Tonhalle; Paris’s Musée d’Orsay; and Oji Hall, Tokyo. Festival highlights include Aix-en-Provence, Aldeburgh, Edinburgh, Heidelberger Frühling, Munich, San Francisco, Ravinia, the Schubertiade in Hohenems and Schwarzenberg, Seoul, Toronto and Vancouver.

He has enjoyed fruitful partnerships with Sir Thomas Allen, Louise Alder, Mary Bevan, Ian Bostridge, Allan Clayton, Dame Sarah Connolly, Marianne Crebassa, Véronique Gens, Iestyn Davies, Fatma Said, Huw Montague Rendall, Christiane Karg, Sir Simon Keenlyside, Elsa Dreisig, Angelika Kirchschlager, Katharina Konradi, Dame Felicity Lott, Christopher Maltman, John Mark Ainsley, Ann Murray DBE, James Newby, Mark Padmore, Konstantin Krimmel, Mauro

Peter, Miah Persson, Sophie Rennert, Dorothea Röschmann, Carolyn Sampson, Nicky Spence and Roderick Williams.

His award-winning discography on Warner, Harmonia Mundi, BIS, Chandos and Signum, amongst others, includes multiple honours: the Diapason d’Or, Edison Award and Prix Caecilia, alongside nominations for *Gramophone*, *Opus Klassik*, *BBC Music Magazine* and the International Classical Music Awards. Committed to expanding the song repertoire, he has commissioned and premiered works by composers including Thomas Adès, Helen Grime, Mark-Anthony Turnage, Hannah Kendall, Errollyn Wallen, Mark Simpson and Nico Muhly. At the 2018 BBC Proms he premiered recently discovered songs by Benjamin Britten alongside Dame Sarah Connolly. He is frequently called upon to give masterclasses, with recent seasons taking him to Toronto Summer Music, Ravinia in Chicago, Britten-Pears in Aldeburgh, deSingel Antwerp, Samling and the Royal Opera House, London.

Highlights of the 2025–26 season include recitals alongside Dorothea Röschmann, Fatma Said, Louise Alder, Elsa Dreisig, Dame Sarah Connolly, Huw Montague Rendall, Hera Hyesang Park, Katharina Konradi, Carolyn Sampson and Hugh Cutting at venues including Wigmore Hall, the Palau de les Arts Reina Sofía, Valencia, the Grand Théâtre de Genève, the Muziekgebouw, Amsterdam, and the Prinzregententheater, Munich. With Elsa Dreisig he will also perform Schumann’s *Frauenliebe und -leben* in staged performances at the Staatsoper Hamburg. His recording projects include an ongoing five-album set of Mahler Lieder for Signum Records.



Upcoming Events

Hera Hyesang Park Soprano Joseph Middleton Piano

Sunday 15 February 2026
7:45PM–9:30PM

Tickets £20.00
Plus booking fees

Howard Assembly Room

Programme to include

Richard Strauss
Gioachino Rossini
Fernando J. Obradors
Ernesto Halffter
Enric Granados
Xavier Montsalvatge
Unyoung Na
Dunam Cho

Fresh from her opening night as Susanna in Opera North's production of *The Marriage of Figaro*, rising star Hera Hyesang Park makes her Leeds Song debut in a vibrant recital with pianist Joseph Middleton.

Their programme spans the elegance of Strauss and Rossini, the fire and passion of Spanish and Catalan composers — including Obradors, Granados, Halffter, and Montsalvatge and the evocative sound world of contemporary Korean song, with works by Unyoung Na and Dunam Cho.

Park's expressive soprano, praised for its clarity, colour, and dramatic intelligence, brings each song vividly to life. This is a rare opportunity to hear Park in an intimate recital setting, following her acclaimed operatic performance the night before. A celebration of vocal storytelling across cultures, styles, and centuries.



Leeds Song Festival 2026

Saturday 11 to Saturday 18 April 2026

View the full festival line-up and book tickets by visiting:

www.leedssong.com/whats-on

Tickets are free for nearly all events to anyone under 30 years old.

Leeds Song Festival returns from Saturday 11 April to Saturday 18 April 2026, bringing together some of the world's most captivating voices, creators, and rising stars for a week-long celebration of art song. Building on the record-breaking success of last year's festival, which saw ticket sales soar by over 30%, the 2026 Festival offers an ambitious programme spanning grand recitals, new commissions, community celebrations, and collaborations that reflect the vibrancy of the city of Leeds.

Headlining this festival include internationally acclaimed performers: Roderick Williams, Dame Sarah Connolly, Louise Alder, Huw Montague Rendall, Marianne Crebassa, Katharina Konradi, Axelle Fanyo, and Fleur Barron. Legendary artists Bernarda Fink, Sir Thomas Allen, Mark Padmore and Julius Drake lead this year's masterclasses, offering audiences the chance to witness great interpreters shaping the next generation of singers. *The nation's favourite choir-master*, Gareth Malone, returns to conduct our community Bring and Sing! chorus.

While the headline recitals take place in two of the finest recital spaces in Yorkshire, Opera North's Howard Assembly Room and Leeds Conservatoire's The Venue, Leeds Song will reach new audiences by taking the most eclectic programme of song to the very heart of the city's diverse cultural scene: for the first time to the trendy Left Bank Leeds, Leeds City Museum, The Royal Armouries Museum, and The Attic.



Our Supporters

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The Friends are the heartbeat of Leeds Song, providing ambassadorship, community and generous support throughout the year.

By becoming a Friend of Leeds Song you are directly supporting our education programmes, Young Artist training scheme, and helping us mount an annual world-class festival of song. In return, you can benefit from priority booking of Festival tickets and invitations to exclusive events, recitals and masterclasses throughout the year.

You can learn more about becoming a Friend of Leeds Song, or supporting Leeds Song in other ways, by visiting www.leedssong.com/support-us, or by speaking to a member of the Leeds Song team at today's recital.



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Festival Office, Suite E7.6, Joseph's Well, Hanover Walk, Leeds LS3 1AB
0113 243 4438 | info@leedssong.com | www.leedssong.com
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