

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Ruby Hughes: Schubert and Other Folksongs

Friday 27 June 2025, 7pm | Queen Elizabeth Hall

Classical music has always had reinvention at its core. Throughout our programme, we at the Southbank Centre – alongside our Resident Orchestras and Resident Artists – capture that trailblazing spirit with works that broke the mould across the ages and brand-new approaches to timeless classics.

However you choose to experience the endlessly inventive world of classical music, we're so glad that you're doing it here with us. Welcome to Classical Music: Spring/Summer 2025.

Toks Dada, Head of Classical Music, Southbank Centre

Repertoire

Schubert *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen* (The Shepherd on the rock)
arr. Peter Jones for voice, cello & piano, D.965 12'

Kodály *Sonatina* for cello & piano 8'

Tavener *Dante, Boris Pasternak & Dvustishie* (Couplet) from
Akhmatova Songs for voice & cello 9'

Brahms *2 Songs*, Op.91 10'

Interval

Britten *Folksongs arrangements: I wonder as I wander,
At the mid hour of night (Molly, my dear) & How sweet the
answer (The Wren)* for voice & piano 10'

Deborah Pritchard *Storm Song* 5'

Janáček *Pohádka* (Fairy tale) for cello & piano 12'

Ravel *Kaddisch* from *2 Mélodies hébraïques*
for voice & piano 5'

Bloch *From Jewish Life – 3 sketches* for cello & piano 8'

Schubert *Auf dem Strom* (On the river), D.943 10'

Performers

Ruby Hughes *soprano*

Natalie Clein *cello*

Julius Drake *piano*

Sometimes firmly foregrounded, sometimes subtly concealed, the distinctive sounds of folksong echo through the grand arch of tonight's programme, which straddles the worlds of song and chamber music, and charts an eventful, two-century musical journey from the early 1800s to the present day and back again.

To call tonight's opening work simply a song, however, is doing it a disservice. Franz Schubert's *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen* (The Shepherd on the rock) is virtually a miniature opera scene, in which the eponymous herdsman contemplates his loneliness from a lofty mountaintop, before looking ahead to new life and rebirth with the return of spring. Schubert combined verse by two poets – Wilhelm Müller and Karl August Varnhagen – to create his quietly profound examination of despair and hope, setting the texts for soprano, clarinet and piano (today's arrangement by Peter Jones replaces the clarinet with cello). As in so many of his songs, Schubert tackles existential questions within an apparently everyday setting, even nodding to folk sounds of his Alpine setting with evocations of a shepherd's piping and a distinctively yodelling vocal line. It is generally considered to be Schubert's penultimate work, completed before his death in 1828 at the age of just 31. The soprano who commissioned the piece – Anna Milder-Hauptmann, one of the leading singers of the day – only received the score ten months after Schubert's demise.

Zoltán Kodály's miniature cello *Sonatina* had a complicated genesis, beginning life as a movement added in 1922 to his larger-scale Cello Sonata before being carved away into a separate, free-standing work. Alongside his compatriot Béla Bartók, Kodály was a tireless chronicler and scholar of the folk music of his native Hungary, and of countries far further afield. It's perhaps no surprise that the distinctive shapes and melodies of Hungarian tunes would provide the unmistakable flavours of much of his music, though his love for French composers Debussy and Ravel is also evident in the *Sonatina*'s rippling textures.

Eastern connections continue in the six songs for voice and cello that English mystical composer John Tavener wrote to verse by Odesa-born Anna Akhmatova in 1993. Nominated twice for the Nobel Prize for literature, Akhmatova was a powerful chronicler of the USSR's brutal repressions, something Tavener reflected in his austere 1980 setting of her

This performance lasts approximately 2 hours including an interval.

Requiem. Tonight's later songs adopt a slightly lighter tone. In the three we hear, 'Dante' incorporates the distinctive sounds of an Indian raga in its celebration of the medieval Florence-born writer, while there's a sense of Russian folk melody in his very brief 'Boris Pasternak', a tribute to the author of *Dr Zhivago*. The more dramatic 'Couplet' opens with a lengthy cello solo, before the soprano's declamations expressing Akhmatova's suspicion of praise of her own work.

Johannes Brahms completed his *2 Songs*, Op. 91, in 1884, and intended them for a specific couple, and for specific purposes. The dedicatees were his great friend Joseph Joachim, violinist and composer, and his wife, the distinguished mezzo-soprano Amalie Joachim. 'Geistliches Wiegenlied' (Sacred Lullaby) was conceived as a work that Joseph and Amalie might sing to their new-born son, Johannes, named after Brahms and also made his godson. The restful nature evocations of 'Gestillte Sehnsucht' (Stilled Longing) were designed to paint a picture of domestic bliss, in the hope of repairing a growing rift between Joseph and Amalie by reminding them of their abiding love – with little success, since they divorced in 1884, with Brahms almost losing one of his closest friends by expressing support for Amalie.

From folk references so deeply embedded that they might be overlooked, we move to a trio of songs that shine a bright spotlight on their folk origins. Benjamin Britten wrote dozens of settings of existing folksongs throughout his career, in six collections plus several others published after his death in 1976. And though he took care to preserve the originals' melodies, he surrounded those tunes with more striking accompaniments that might raise a few eyebrows. 'I wonder as I wander' does little to its original Appalachian folk tune, save for the addition of a few spontaneous-sounding, sometimes birdsong-like piano figures. 'In the mid hour of night' floats its Irish melody on top of a gently chiming piano part, while 'How sweet the answer' introduces gentle dissonances in its echoing piano figures that unsettle the rapturous vocal line.

Storm Song by contemporary English composer Deborah Pritchard dates from as recently as 2017. It was commissioned by the University of Oxford – where Pritchard was a Visiting Research Fellow at Keble College – for International Women's Day, setting a new poem specially written for the project by Jeanette Winterson. The text lines up the threat of an approaching storm against a more metaphysical tempest of the soul, and Pritchard's music accordingly moves through danger and violence to surprising colour, light and clarity as the storm finally breaks.

The tale which forms the basis of Leoš Janáček's cello-and-piano *Pohádka* (Fairy tale) is by early 19th-century Russian writer Vasily Andreyevich Zhukovsky, who weaves together numerous folk sources in his story of Tsar Berendey, and his son Ivan, and the younger man's love for Princess Maria – whose father happens to be Kaschei, King of the Underworld. The piece had a complicated genesis: Janáček wrote a first version in 1910, adding a movement in 1912, then rewriting the piece substantially in 1923 and returning it to its original three movements. Those movements trace Ivan and Maria's troubled love affair, from pursuit by the angry Kaschei in the first movement's galloping rhythms, to kidnap by a rival Tsar and Tsarina in the lyrical second movement, to a celebratory reunion in the jaunty finale.

Maurice Ravel drew on Hebrew music in his austere but powerful 'Kaddish', the first of his *Deux mélodies hébraïques* of 1914. It's a text and melody that are most commonly considered a prayer for the dead, heard in funeral services and memorials, though its intention is to glorify God and sanctify His name. Like Tavener and Britten earlier in tonight's

programme, Ravel keeps his accompaniment to a sparse minimum – just a few tolling chords, single notes and gentle ripples – so that the heavily decorated declamations of his ecstatic vocal line shine through brightly.

Swiss-American composer Ernest Bloch was one of the great chroniclers of Jewish history and traditions in music, devoting several works to his faith and heritage. He wrote the three short movements of *From Jewish Life* for cello and piano in 1924 for cellist Hans Kindler, who in 1917 had premiered Bloch's cello rhapsody *Schelomo* (based on the Biblical story of Solomon). The first movement uses traditional modes in its evocation of synagogue prayer, while the second conveys gentle religious fervour in its greater energy and movement. The final movement is a wistful song that begins somewhat hesitantly, and closes even more thoughtfully.

The concert concludes back where it started, with another metaphysical meditation masquerading as a simple song by Schubert. Like *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen*, Schubert composed *Auf dem Strom* (On the River) just a few months before his death, specifically for a concert in Vienna in March 1828 devoted entirely to his own music. He had moved that performance's date so that it would coincide with the first-year anniversary of the death of Ludwig van Beethoven: though Schubert was too awe-struck ever to speak to his great musical idol, he served as a pall-bearer at the elder man's funeral in March 1827. And *Auf dem Strom* represents Schubert's hushed, respectful musical tribute to the man he so admired. He not only directly quotes the funeral march from Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony in this paean to his own hero, but in setting Ludwig Rellstab's verse on a traveller swept away along a surging river – whose ceaseless flow is evoked in Schubert's restless piano figurations – he also offers a poignant contemplation of loss, isolation and death.

Programme note © David Kettle, 2025

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Franz Schubert

Der Hirt auf dem Felsen (The Shepherd on the rock)

arr. Peter Jones for voice, cello & piano, D.965

Wenn auf dem höchsten Fels ich steh',
In's tiefe Tal hernieder seh',
Und singe,

Fern aus dem tiefen dunkeln Tal
Schwingt sich empor der Widerhall
Der Klüfte.

Je weiter meine Stimme dringt,
Je heller sie mir wieder klingt
Von unten.

Mein Liebchen wohnt so weit von mir,
Drum seh'n ich mich so heiß nach ihr
Hinüber.

In tiefem Gram verzehr ich mich,
Mir ist die Freude hin,
Auf Erden mir die Hoffnung wich,
Ich hier so einsam bin.

So sehnd klang im Wald das Lied,
So sehnd klang es durch die Nacht,
Die Herzen es zum Himmel zieht
Mit wunderbarer Macht.

Der Frühling will kommen,
Der Frühling, meine Freud',
Nun mach' ich mich fertig
Zum Wandern bereit.

Text by Wilhelm Müller

When I stand on the highest rock,
Look down into the deep valley
And sing,

From far away in the deep dark valley
The echo from the ravines
Rises up.

The further my voice carries,
The clearer it echoes back to me
From below.

My sweetheart lives so far from me,
Therefore I long so to be with her
Over there.

Deep grief consumes me,
My joy has fled,
All earthly hope has vanished,
I am so lonely here.

The song rang out so longingly through the wood,
Rang out so longingly through the night,
That it draws hearts to heaven
With wondrous power.

Spring is coming,
Spring, my joy,
I shall now make ready
to journey.

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**John Tavener: Dante, Boris Pasternak & Dvustishie (Couplet)
from Akhmatova Songs for voice & cello**

Данте

Он и после смерти не вернулся
В старую Флоренцию свою.
Этот, уходя, не оглянулся,
Этому я эту песнь пою.
Он из ада ей послал проклятье
И в раю не мог её забыть, -

Борис Пастернак

Он награждён каким-то вечным детством,
Той щедростью и зоркостью светил,
И вся земля была его наследством,
А он её со всеми разделил.

Двустиише

От других мне хвала - что зола.
От тебя и хула - похвала.

Text by Anna Akhmatova

Dante

He, even after death, didn't return
To his old Florence.
In leaving, didn't look back,
To him, I sing this song.
He, from Hades, cursed her
And in Paradise couldn't forget her, -

Boris Pasternak

He, endowed with some eternal childhood
He coloured [his writing as though] open-handed, clear-sighted,
And [the] whole earth was his heritage,
And he shared this with everyone.

Couplet

For me, praise from others [is] like ashes.
From you, even blame [is] praise.

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Johannes Brahms
2 Songs, Op.91

Gestillte Sehnsucht

In goldnen Abendschein getaucht,
Wie feierlich die Wälder stehn!
In leise Stimmen der Vöglein hauchet
Des Abendwindes leises Wehn.
Was lispeln die Winde, die Vögelein?
Sie lispeln die Welt in Schlummer ein.

Ihr Wünsche, die ihr stets euch reget
Im Herzen sonder Rast und Ruh!
Du Sehnen, das die Brust bewegt,
Wann ruhest du, wann schlummerst du?
Beim Lispeln der Winde, der Vögelein,
Ihr sehnenen Wünsche, wann schlaft ihr ein?

Ach, wenn nicht mehr in goldne Fernen
Mein Geist auf Traumgefieder eilt,
Nicht mehr an ewig fernen Sternen
Mit sehndem Blick mein Auge weit;
Dann lispeln die Winde, die Vögelein
Mit meinem Sehnen mein Leben ein.

Text by Friedrich Rückert

Geistliches Wiegenlied

Die ihr schwebet
Um diese Palmen
In Nacht und Wind,
Ihr heil'gen Engel,
Stillet die Wipfel!
Es schlummert mein Kind.

Ihr Palmen von Bethlehem
Im Windesbrausen,
Wie mögt ihr heute
So zornig sausen!
O rauscht nicht also!
Schweiget, neiget
Euch leis' und lind;
Stillet die Wipfel!
Es schlummert mein Kind.

Der Himmelsknabe
Duldet Beschwerde,
Ach, wie so müd' er ward
Vom Leid der Erde.
Ach nun im Schlaf ihm
Leise gesänftigt
Die Qual zerrinnt,
Stillet die Wipfel!
Es schlummert mein Kind.

Grimmige Kälte
Sauset hernieder,
Womit nur deck' ich
Des Kindleins Glieder!
O all ihr Engel,
Die ihr geflügelt
Wandelt im Wind,
Stillet die Wipfel!
Es schlummert mein kind.

Text by Emanuel Geibel

Assuaged longing

Bathed in golden evening light,
How solemnly the forests stand!
The evening winds mingle softly
With the soft voices of the birds.
What do the winds, the birds whisper?
They whisper the world to sleep.

But you, my desires, ever stirring
In my heart without respite!
You, my longing, that agitates my breast –
When will you rest, when will you sleep?
The winds and the birds whisper,
But when will you, yearning desires, slumber?

Ah! when my spirit no longer hastens
On wings of dreams into golden distances,
When my eyes no longer dwell yearningly
On eternally remote stars;
Then shall the winds, the birds whisper
My life – and my longing – to sleep.

Translation by Richard Stokes, author of *The Book of Lieder* (Faber, 2005)

A sacred cradle-song

You who hover
Around these palms
In night and wind,
You holy angels,
Silence the tree-tops!
My child is sleeping.

You palms of Bethlehem
In the raging wind,
Why do you bluster
So angrily today!
O roar not so!
Be still, lean
Calmly and gently over us;
Silence the tree-tops!
My child is sleeping.

The heavenly babe
Suffers distress,
Oh, how weary He has grown
With the sorrows of this world.
Ah, now that in sleep
His pains
Are gently eased,
Silence the treetops!
My child is sleeping.

Fierce cold
Blows down on us,
With what shall I cover
My little child's limbs?
O all you angels,
Who wing your way
On the winds,
Silence the tree-tops!
My child is sleeping.

Translation by Richard Stokes, author of *The Book of Lieder* (Faber, 2005)

Benjamin Britten

Folksongs arrangements for voice & piano:

I wonder as I wander

I wonder as I wander out under the sky
how Jesus the Saviour did come for to die
for poor ordn'ry people like you and like I
I wonder as I wander out under the sky

when Mary birthed Jesus 'twas in a cow stall
with wise men and farmers and shepherds and all
but high from the Heavens a star's light did fall
and a promise of ages it then did recall

If Jesus had wanted for any wee thing
A star in the sky or a bird on the wing;
Or all of God's angels in Heav'n for to sing,
He surely could have it 'cause he was the King!

Text by John Jacob Niles (1892 – 1980)

At the mid hour of night (Molly, my dear);

At the mid hour of night, when stars are weeping, I fly
To the lone vale we loved, when life shone warm in thine eye;
And I think oft, if spirits can steal from the regions of air
To revisit past scenes of delight, thou wilt come to me there,
And tell me our love is remember'd even in the sky.

Then I sing the wild song it once was rapture to hear,
When our voices commingling breathed like one on the ear;
And as Echo far off through the vale my sad orison rolls,
I think, O my love! 'tis thy voice from the Kingdom of Souls
Faintly answering still the notes that once were so dear.

Text by Thomas Moore (1779 – 1852)

How sweet the answer (The Wren)

How sweet the answer Echo makes
To Music at night,
When, rous'd by lute or horn, she wakes,
And far away, o'er lawns and lakes,
Goes answering light!

Yet Love hath echoes truer far,
And far more sweet,
Than e'er beneath the moonlight's star,
Of horn, or lute, or soft guitar,
The songs repeat.

'Tis when the sigh, in youth sincere,
And only then, –
The sigh that's breath'd for one to hear,
Is by that one, that only dear,
Breath'd back again.

Text by Thomas Moore (1779 – 1852)

Deborah Pritchard
Storm Song

THE CENTRE OF THE STORM
IS THE CENTRE OF MY HEART
NO STILLNESS THERE
BUT ELSEWHERE

MY BODY IS WRAPPED IN A SHEET OF RAIN
MY HAIR IS A DARK CLOUD
MY VOICE IS THE THUNDER
LOUD, LOUD, LOUDER

DO YOU HEAR ME CALL?

MY BOD-Y IS A ROD OF BEAUT-Y
I AM THE KITE THAT FLIES IN THE STORM
I AM THE LIGHTNING AND THE KITE
THE JAG OF LIGHT

THAT FALLS WITHOUT FALLING
TO THE EARTH WITHOUT END
WHAT COLOUR IS THE DAWN
THAT HOLDS THE STORM?

Text by Jeanette Winterson, 2017

Maurice Ravel
Kaddisch from 2 Mélodies hébraïques for voice & piano

Yithgaddal weyithkaddash scheméh rabba
be'olmà diverà 'khire'outhé
veyamli'kl mal'khouté'khôn,
ouvezome'khôn
ouve'hayyé de'khol beth yisraël
ba'agalâ ouvizman qariw
weimrou, Amen.
Yithbara'kh Weyischtaba'h
weyithpaêr weyithroman,
weyithnassé weyithhaddar,
weyith'allé weyithhallal
scheméh dequoudschâ beri'kh hou,
l'êla ulé'êla mikkol bir'khatha
weschi'ratha touschbehata wene'hamathâ
daamirân ah! Be'olma ah! Ah! Ah!
We imrou. Amen.

Text: Jewish liturgical prayer

May his great name be exalted and sanctified
in the world which He created according to His will
may He establish his kingdom,
during your days
and during the lifetimes of all the House of Israel
speedily and very soon,
And say, So be it.
Blessed and praised,
glorified and exalted,
extolled and honored,
adored and lauded,
be the name of the Holy One, blessed be He,
above and beyond all the blessings,
hymns, praises, and consolations
that are uttered in the world.
We say, So be it.

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Franz Schubert
Auf dem Strom (On the river), D.943

Nimm die letzten Abschiedsküsse,
Und die wehenden, die Grüße,
Die ich noch ans Ufer sende
Eh' Dein Fuß sich scheidend wende!
Schon wird von des Stromes Wogen
Rasch der Nachen fortgezogen,
Doch den thränendunklen Blick
Zieht die Sehnsucht stets zurück!

Und so trägt mich denn die Welle
Fort mit unerflehter Schnelle.
Ach, schon ist die Flur verschwunden
Wo ich selig Sie gefunden!
Ewig hin, ihr Wonnetage!
Hoffnungsleer verhallt die Klage
Um das schöne Heimathland,
Wo ich ihre Liebe fand.

Sieh, wie flieht der Strand vorüber,
Und wie drängt es mich hinüber,
Zieht mit unnennbaren Banden,
An der Hütte dort zu landen,
In der Laube dort zu weilen;
Doch des Stromes Wellen eilen
Weiter, ohne Rast und Ruh,
Führen mich dem Weltmeer zu!

Ach, vor jener dunklen Wüste,
Fern von jeder heitern Küste,
Wo kein Eiland zu erschauen,
O, wie faßt mich zitternd Grauen!
Wehmuthstränen sanft zu bringen,
Kann kein Lied vom Ufer dringen;
Nur der Sturm weht kalt daher
Durch das grau gehob'ne Meer!

Kann des Auges sehrend Schweifen
Keine Ufer mehr ergreifen,
Nun so blick' ich zu den Sternen
Dort in jenen heil'gen Fernen!
Ach bei ihrem milden Scheine
Nannt' ich sie zuerst die Meine;
Dort vielleicht, o tröstend Glück!
Dort begegn' ich ihrem Blick.

Text by Ludwig Rellstab (1799 – 1860)

Take the last parting kiss,
and the wavy greeting
that I'm still sending ashore
before you turn your feet and leave!
Already the waves of the stream
are pulling briskly at my boat,
yet my tear-dimmed gaze
keeps being tugged back by longing!

And so the waves bear me forward
with unsympathetic speed.
Ah, the fields have already disappeared
where I once discovered her!
Blissful days, you are eternally past!
Hopelessly my lament echoes
around my fair homeland,
where I found her love.

See how the shore dashes past;
yet how drawn I am to cross:
I'm pulled by unnameable bonds
to land there by that little hut
and to linger there beneath the foliage;
but the waves of the river
hurry me onward without rest,
leading me out to the sea!

Ah, before that dark wasteland
far from every smiling coast,
where no island can be seen -
oh how I'm gripped with trembling horror!
Gently bringing tears of grief,
songs from the shore can no longer reach me;
only a storm, blowing coldly from there,
can cross the grey, heaving sea!

If my longing eyes, surveying the shore,
can no longer glimpse it,
then I will gaze upward to the stars
into that sacred distance!
Ah, beneath their placid light
I once called her mine;
there perhaps, o comforting future!
there perhaps I shall meet her gaze.

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