



An Atlantic Spring

Friday 9th June, 2023

12:30pm

Trinity College Chapel

Rachel Howe, soprano

Mark Zang, piano

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A recital of 20th-century English and American art song and piano music

Performed by **Rachel Howe**, soprano, and **Mark Zang**, piano.

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Rachel Howe, soprano

Inspired and encouraged by her family, Rachel's journey as a musician began during her childhood here in Cambridge. She began by studying piano with the Cann sisters and singing with Christina Barry, whilst also participating in innumerable musical activities at school (choirs, small ensembles, concerts, musicals - you name it!) After completing her International Baccalaureate studies, Rachel spent a year teaching classroom music at Dame Bradbury's school in Saffron Walden before going on to read Music at The Queen's College, Oxford. At Oxford, Rachel held an academic exhibition and the prestigious Hildburg Williams Lieder Scholarship in the chapel choir at Queen's. She was also a member of jazz vocal ensemble, The Oxford Gargoyles, and performed regularly in ensembles and as a soprano soloist throughout the city and further afield, most notably for Secretary Hillary Clinton's honorary degree ceremony private dinner! After graduating, Rachel chose to remain in Oxford and work in events and marketing for The Oxford International Song Festival - the ideal role for someone who loves Lieder! During this year, Rachel continued her personal musical studies, training predominantly with Giles Underwood at the Royal Academy of Music. She also expanded her freelance work and took on unique projects as a charity concert coordinator and as a writer of female composer biographies for SWAP'ra. In April Rachel took on a new full-time role in London, challenging her creative and operational management skills in a new context as head of the Generalist careers programme at Jumpstart - placing junior candidates in impactful startup companies. She continues to sing (as today!) and is a current member of the Sixteen's prestigious young artists' programme, Genesis Sixteen.

Mark Zang, piano

Currently Interim Organist and Assistant Director of Music at Great St Mary's, the University Church, Mark began his musical journey studying the piano from roughly four years of age. He won a scholarship to the Purcell School of Music, where he studied for eight years; during his time there, he studied with Valeria Szervansky and Danielle Salamon, participated in masterclasses with pianists such as Dimitri Alexeev and Bernard d'Ascoli, and performed at venues such as Milton Court, St Martin-in-the-Fields, and the Wigmore Hall. Towards the end of his time at Purcell, Mark began studies on the organ with Anne Marsden Thomas, and subsequently became an organ scholar at Emmanuel College, where he studied for both an undergraduate and postgraduate degree in music. During his studies, Mark performed prolifically as both soloist and accompanist, appearing in several recitals per term; last year, he directed Emmanuel College Choir's summer tour, and was the winner of the University's concerto competition, leading to a performance of Britten's Piano Concerto with the Cambridge University Orchestra under Delyana Lazarova last February. Mark also enjoys singing; he currently sings with St John's Voices, having appeared as a soloist on their BBC Radio 3 Evensong in April, and, along with Rachel, is a member of this year's Genesis Sixteen cohort.

Programme

'Come to me in my dreams' by Frank Bridge (1879-1941), text by Matthew Arnold (1822-1888)

Matthew Arnold's poignant poem 'Longing' (1852) was set to music numerous times during the 20th century, including by Maude Valérie White (featured later in this recital) and Sir Arthur Somervell. Bridge's setting, characteristically affecting yet unfussy, transports the listener through passages of ethereal stillness, to agitated passion, and back again. A true musical rendering of Arnold's autobiographical poetic journey as he longed for his fiancé, Frances Lucy Wightman, for over a year whilst her father fought to keep them apart.

*Come to me in my dreams, and then
By day I shall be well again!
For then the night will more than pay
The hopeless longing of the day.*

*Or, as thou never cam'st in sooth,
Come now, and let me dream it truth;
And part my hair, and kiss my brow,
And say - My love! why sufferest thou?*

*Come, as thou cam'st a thousand times,
A messenger from radiant climes,
And smile on thy new world, and be
As kind to all the rest as me.*

*Come to me in my dreams, and then
By day I shall be well again!
For then the night will more than pay
The hopeless longing of the day.*

'Spring' from Five Elizabethan Songs by Ivor Gurney (1890-1937), text by Thomas Nashe (1567-c.1601)

'Spring' is the last of Ivor Gurney's *Five Elizabethan Songs*, published in 1920. He began the compositions in around 1914 just before the outbreak of WWI and was extremely pleased with them (noted in a wonderful letter from Gurney to his close friend from the Royal College of Music, Marion Scott). Quintessentially English in character, 'Spring' communicates an exuberant pastoral playfulness (especially in the vocal imitation of birdsong). Indeed, its bright and joyful mood is far removed from Gurney's personal struggles with lifelong mental illness.

*Spring, the sweet spring, is the year's pleasant king,
Then blooms each thing, then maids dance in a ring,
Cold doth not sting, the pretty birds do sing:
Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo!*

*The palm and may make country houses gay,
Lambs frisk and play, the shepherds pipe all day,
And we hear aye birds tune this merry lay:
Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo!*

*The fields breathe sweet, the daisies kiss our feet,
Young lovers meet, old wives a-sunning sit,
In every street these tunes our ears do greet:
Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to witta-woo!
Spring, the sweet spring!*

‘So we’ll go no more a’roving’ by Maude Valerie White (1855-1937), text by Lord Byron (George Gordon) (1788-1824)

Though perhaps the least recognisable female name in this programme, Maude Valerie White was once ‘known and loved everywhere the English language is spoken’ (J. A. Fuller Maitland, 1903). In fact, her emotionally ‘unashamed’ musical voice was a notable influence on Roger Quilter, Ralph Vaughan-Williams and others, significantly steering the development of twentieth-century English art-song. In ‘*So we’ll go no more a’roving*’, White revels in the rich, luxurious sound world of Edwardian England, neatly summed up by 2020 Kathleen Ferrier winner, Jessica Cale, as ‘Indulgent, in a lovely way’.

*So we’ll go no more a’roving
So late into the night,
Though the heart be still as loving,
And the moon be still as bright.*

*Though the night was made for loving,
And the day returns too soon,
Yet we’ll go no more a’roving
By the light of the moon.*

*For the sword outwears its sheath,
And the soul wears out the breast,
And the heart must pause to breathe,
And love itself have rest.*

‘Love’s Philosophy’ by Roger Quilter (1877-1953), text by Percy Shelley (1792-1822)

A favourite amongst English art song enthusiasts, ‘*Love’s Philosophy*’ remains one of Roger Quilter’s most widely performed works. The intricate, flowing piano part underpins a similarly gushing vocal line, each phrase breathlessly anticipating the next. This sense of abundance and fluidity reinforces the meaning of Shelley’s text: as passionate love develops just as fountains might grow to rivers and rivers become oceans.

*The fountains mingle with the river
And the rivers with the ocean,
The winds of heaven mix for ever
With a sweet emotion;
Nothing in the world is single;
All things by a law divine
In one another’s being mingle.
Why not I with thine?—*

*See the mountains kiss high heaven
And the waves clasp one another;
No sister-flower would be forgiven
If it disdained its brother;
And the sunlight clasps the earth
And the moonbeams kiss the sea:
What is all these kissings worth
If thou kiss not me?*

I. The Princess from *A Fairy Tale*, H. 128 (1917)

III. Allegretto ben moderato from *Three Miniature Pastorals*, H. 127 (1917) by Frank Bridge (1879-1941)

Although later in his life Bridge would turn to a far more dissonant and complex harmonic language, his early works are strongly indebted to the late Romantic style – though even early on one can see Bridge’s characteristic compositional fingerprint. During the 1910s Bridge would begin to experiment with more modernist approaches to harmony, such as in *Four Characteristic Pieces* H. 114 (1913-14), where one could be fooled into thinking Scriabin was the composer; or in his *Dance Poem* H. 111 (1913) for orchestra, where one clearly hears the influence of Stravinsky’s three ballets for Diaghilev; however, during this time, Bridge can still be found composing much more light-hearted music, such as his well-known partsong *The Bee* H. 110 (1913), and it is in this style that these two short piano pieces are written. Though both are clearly written in a very approachable style, *The Princess* is noticeably more advanced in its tonal idiom, wandering off in mysterious directions for a few brief moments, whilst the *Pastoral* is much more straightforward—and perhaps more “British”?

‘Nature the gentlest mother’ from *12 Poems of Emily Dickinson* by Aaron Copland (1900-1990), text by Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

Each of Copland’s *12 Poems of Emily Dickinson* settings has a unique mood and style. ‘*Nature the gentlest mother*’ demonstrates his extraordinary skill of word painting, bringing to life Dickinson’s intricate poetic details through seamless variation of melody, texture and rhythm. Guiding the listener through pastoral stillness, to the almost feverish excitement of energetic birds and animals, to a tender, yet noble, depiction of protective Mother Nature, this song is a journey of the best kind!

*Nature, the gentlest mother
Impatient of no child,
The feeblest or the waywardest,—
Her admonition mild*

*Her voice among the aisles
Incites the timid prayer
Of the minutest cricket,
The most unworthy flower.*

*In forest and the hill
By traveller is heard,
Restraining rampant squirrel
Or too impetuous bird.*

*When all the children sleep
She turns as long away
As will suffice to light her lamps;
Then, bending from the sky,*

*How fair her conversation,
A summer afternoon,—
Her household, her assembly;
And when the sun goes down*

*With infinite affection
And infiniter care,
Her golden finger on her lip,
Wills silence everywhere.*

Three Shakespeare Songs by Amy Beach (1867-1944), text by William Shakespeare (c.1585-1613)

Though it might come as a surprise to modern-day listeners, the New Hampshire composer Amy Beach was also a regular name in concert programmes during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century. Indeed, it's by no mistake that Wikipedia hails her the 'first successful American female composer of large-scale art music'! Whilst best known for her impressive oeuvre of masses, piano concertos and symphonies (most notably, her Gaelic Symphony of 1896), Beach composed over 150 songs during her lifetime - many of which are truly beautiful. The *Three Shakespeare Songs* derive their texts from *Twelfth Night*, *Measure for Measure* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* respectively. 'O Mistress Mine' and 'Fairy Lullaby' have a real spring in their step (perfect for this programme!), complete with dancing melodies and rhythms, recurrent across Beach's early folk-infused style. 'Take, o take those lips away' speaks more to Beach's later style, incorporating hints of chromaticism and sweeping Romantic phrases.

I. 'O Mistress Mine'

*O Mistress mine where are you roaming?
O stay and hear, your true love's coming,
That can sing both high and low.
Trip no further pretty sweeting,
Journeys end in lovers' meeting,
Every wise man's son doth know.*

*What is love, 'tis not hereafter,
Present mirth, hath present laughter:
What's to come, is still unsure.
In delay there lies no plenty,
Then come kiss me sweet and twenty:
Youth's a stuff will not endure.*

II. 'Take, O take those lips away'

*Take, oh take those lips away,
That so sweetly were forsworn,
And those eyes: the breake of day,
Lights that do mislead the Morn;
But my kisses bring again, bring again,
Seals of love, but sealed in vain, sealed in vain.*

III. 'Fairy Lullaby'

*Philomel, with melody,
Sing in our sweet lullaby;
Lulla, lulla, lullaby; lulla, lulla, lullaby!
Never harm,
Nor spell nor charm,
Come our lovely lady nigh.
So, good night, with lullaby.*

The Cat and the Mouse by Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

The Cat and the Mouse, amusingly subtitled ‘*Scherzo Humoristique*’, was composed by Copland at just twenty years old whilst studying in Manhattan under Rubin Goldmark. It went on to become his first published work, a truly momentous occasion for the young composer – not least because the buyer, Jacques Durand, was publisher to Debussy, one of Copland’s greatest inspirations! The piece is based on Jean de la Fontain’s fable ‘*The Old Cat and the Young Mouse*’; a rather dismal poem, it tells of a merciless, experienced cat refusing to take pity on a feeble mouse begging for freedom...

‘The Swing’ from *The Daisy Chain* by Liza Lehmann (1862-1918), text by Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894)

Whilst known for her art songs, parlour songs and children’s songs, Liza Lehmann was first and foremost an English operatic soprano. That might explain some of the acrobatic mischief she gets up to in this song, ‘The Swing’. Another female composer who has received far less attention than she deserves, Lehmann lived a fascinating life - much of which she recorded in some wonderfully-written memoirs. Her music was deeply inspired by Clara Schumann, whom she spent some time studying with in Frankfurt. A favourite anecdote of the trip relates Lehmann’s disgust upon meeting Brahms – the man who had long ‘set the student heart aflame’ – that was until he consumed for breakfast a whole tin of sardines and then drank the oil straight from the tin. Highly intelligent and a gifted teacher, Lehmann went on to become a professor of singing at the Guildhall School of Music and the first president of the Society of Women Musicians. ‘The Swing’ is a setting of Robert Louis Stevenson’s children’s poem, taken from a set of twelve children’s songs White dedicated to her ‘small son Rudolf’. Carefree, and whilst it is perhaps a little over the top, it is a joyful expression of childlike wonder on a summer’s day.

*How do you like to go up in a swing,
Up in the air so blue?
Oh, I do think it the pleasantest thing
Ever a child can do!*

*Till I look down on the garden green,
Down on the roof so brown -
Up in the air I go flying again,
Up in the air and down!*

*Up in the air and over the wall,
Till I can see so wide,
Rivers and trees and cattle and all
Over the countryside -*

‘I Love to Rhyme’ by George Gershwin (1898-1937), text by Ira Gershwin (1896-1983)

It wouldn’t be a 20th-century transatlantic recital without a bit of the Gershwin brothers (right?!). ‘I love to Rhyme’ features in the *The Goldwyn Follies* (though is heavily concealed by some inelegant accordion playing) and was composed just before George Gershwin’s premature death in 1937. Though not the most well-known of their song collaborations (think ‘Summertime’, ‘I Got Rhythm’, ‘Lady, be Good!’ etc.), you can’t help but smile at this one!
