

Heaven + Earth  
Beauty + Love  
{ once more }

Saint-Saëns – *Ave Verum*  
Saint-Saëns – *Calme des nuits*  
Ešenvalds – *O Salutaris Hostia*  
Ešenvalds – *Only in sleep*

\* \* \*

Brahms – *Liebeslieder Walzer, Op.52*

{ *Invited artists: Chau lok-ting and Chau lok-ping, Piano Duo* }

\* \* \*

Stroope – *I am not yours*  
Elder – *Ballade to the Moon*  
Lauridsen – *Dirait-on*  
French melody / Elder – *Twinkle, twinkle, little star*

*[there will be 2 short 10-minute intermissions]*

The joy in  
discovering and  
rediscovering  
pieces of  
exceptional  
musical qualities.

+  
The power and  
impact of a  
beautiful  
"pianissimo",  
sung together.

THE  
CLASSICAL  
SINGERS

We are a mixed-voice  
ensemble group and we  
sing classical, romantic,  
and modern repertoire.

Miller Theatre, Asia Society, Admiralty, Hong Kong - 2 September 2017 at 7.45pm

## Introduction to The Classical Singers

*In early 2016, a group of working Hong Kong professionals – all of whom love singing and sang in various settings when growing up – were brought together in a small-group vocal ensemble setting.*

*We were inspired by the idea of creating a new group for those of us who are doing it for only 2 reasons: to make music for its beauty (and the spirit of creating something together), and the spirit of trying to be better, of taking a hobby seriously, and to keep learning.*

*We want to be a small group – we are currently operating as an 8-voice ensemble – and to find beautiful music. We bring with us a dream for a beautiful blended sound and for making music that engages. We are also brought together by a joy in discovering and rediscovering vocal repertoire of exceptional quality, whether classical, romantic, or modern.*

*We've called ourselves The Classical Singers – “classical” in the meaning of, first, being exemplary and setting a high standard, and second, we are classically trained and we sing mostly serious art music (though we will also sing some musicals and transcriptions). Overall, our name reflects the value of great music sung with exemplary musicality and a sheer joy in the music-making.*

*You can find more information at [www.theclassicalsingers.com](http://www.theclassicalsingers.com) and [www.facebook.com/theclassicalsingers](http://www.facebook.com/theclassicalsingers)*

“  
brought  
together  
by  
beautiful  
music”

## The Ping & Ting Piano Duo

*Duo Ping & Ting* was top prize winners of several international competitions, including the 64th ARD International Music Competition in Munich, the Fourth International Piano Duo Competition, Bialystok in Poland, the Fourth San Marino International Piano Duo Competition and *Grieg A Deux* International Two Piano Competition. In addition, they were awarded the “André Hoffmann” prize at the renowned “*Sommets Musicaux de Gstaad*” International Music Festival in Switzerland. The Secretary for Home Affairs awarded commendations to the Chau sisters for making outstanding contribution in international arts and culture activities in 2009.

The Duo has often been invited to music festivals worldwide including the Liesborner Chamber music Festival in Germany, the 1<sup>st</sup> International Gedánsk Piano Duo Festival in Poland, the Joy of Music Festival in Hong Kong, the 40th Hong Kong Arts Festival and the 5<sup>th</sup> Gulangyu Piano Festival in Xiamen, China; and collaborated with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, the New Zurich Orchestra and the Bialystok Symphony Orchestra, the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra.

The twin sisters received their Master degrees in University of Music, Drama and Theatre in Hannover (Germany), and the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. They were recipients of the German DAAD Scholarship, the Hong Kong Jockey Club Music and Dance Fund, as well as the Robert N.H. Ho Family Foundation for Outstanding Merits respectively. Their teachers and mentors widely included Professor Eleanor Wong, Alexander Tamir, duo Genova and Dimitrov and duo Yaara Tal and Andreas Groethuysen.

## Notes on the programme

C. SAINT-SAENS  
**Ave Verum**  
(in E flat major)

&

C. SAINT-SAENS  
**Calme des nuits**

We open the concert contrasting the sacred and the secular music of two composers, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century French composer Camille Saint-Saëns and the contemporary Latvian composer Ēriks Ešvalds, both of whom wrote a range of works for the voice.

About 100 years ago, Saint-Saëns famously declared: *"In reality, there is no religious art, properly so called, absolutely to be distinguished from secular art. There is good music, and there is bad music; for the rest, it is a matter of fashion, of convention, and nothing else."*

The *Ave Verum* is a short text attributed to the 14th century that has been set to music by various composers. Mozart's is probably the best known, and Saint-Saëns's is a well-loved version. One could say Saint-Saëns's *Ave Verum* is filled with French romantic harmonies but set within a very classical structure of symmetry and balance. Famously, Saint-Saëns once said that Mozart's *"is the only Ave Verum"*. Though less performed than Mozart's *adagio* setting that is written for choir with strings accompaniment, this *Ave Verum* (marked *moderato* and written to be sung *a cappella*) is, like Mozart's, simple, luminous and beautiful.

Saint-Saëns left us with a good range of both sacred and secular vocal pieces. One can see the same beauty, formal perfection, and elegant precision that is often found in his art in the *Calme des Nuits*, the first of his *Deux Choeurs*, Op.68, published in the 1880s. Resonant in sonority and exquisite in harmony, these are two poems in praise of the natural world, and *Calme des Nuits* is the first of the two.

E. EŠENVALDS  
**O Salutaris Hostia**

&

E. EŠENVALDS  
**Only in sleep**

Ēriks Ešvalds is a Latvian composer (born 1977) who has taken to composing in English. His 2009 setting of Aquinas' Hymn of the Blessed Sacrament for the feast of Corpus Christi, entitled *O Salutaris Hostia*, is unusual for its two soprano solos which weave and intertwine like birds singing in the air. This has become a popular modern choral piece.

Providing an interesting counterpoint is the composer's *"Only in sleep"*, a recent work (written in 2010 and published in 2012) set to American poet Sara Teasdale's text and as Ešvalds spent time attached to Trinity College, University of Cambridge, whose choir has recorded this work (2014, Hyperion).

The Classical Singers gave this piece's first performance in Hong Kong last August, when the composer wrote us with the following notes:

*Only in Sleep - there is almost nothing more to say except to repeat those pure words written by Sara Teasdale in this poem that to remember the years of our childhood and to remember the children we played with is like a precious diamond that makes our life beautiful and so dear.*

Listening to the 2 pieces together may offer the listener a sense of the tonal style of this 40-year-old composer.

J. BRAHMS

### **Liebeslieder Walzer, op.52a**

In tonight's concert, we present one of the two original versions of Brahms' *Liebeslieder Waltzes* Op 52. This is a collection of "love song dances" in *Ländler* style. Brahms wrote these dances during a period, his first decade in Vienna, when he was engaged in editing Schubert's works including his *Ländler*. And it is of interest to note that Brahms did not call these songs but (vocal) dances.

The composer also wrote a second set of similar dances, the Op.65. Both are fairly distinctive as Brahms has not regularly composed for small vocal ensembles and four-hand piano. Op.52 is the version with a mixed-voice ensemble and Op.52a is the four-hands-only version which we present this evening.

A beguiling set of 18 pieces, each relatively short and encompassing a range of musical moods set to witty texts full of energy, irony and humour, the waltzes were written quickly and the composer referred to them as "pretty concert pieces" to his publisher. There are simple stories, passionate outbursts, brooding melancholy, and songs of deep devotion. Starting in E major, the pieces cycle through a variety of major and minor keys, temporarily returning to E major in #9, and engineering a final return in the final piece (#18) and ending with a descending melodic line, a *decrescendo*, *ritardando* and a *fermata*.

Do you prefer the unsung or sung version of this piece?

R. STROOPE

### **I am not yours**

*I am not yours* is a poem by American poet Sara Teasdale about her complicated thoughts in her love for her partner and the love he has for her in return, confessing a separateness which maintains a distance and a longing for an experience that overwhelms her. In this *a cappella* setting by contemporary American choral composer and conductor Z Randall Stroope, the wistful and reflective mood is clear in the first two stanzas, with the long notes separated by short rests declarative of her longing. And by framing the piece with a return to the opening material at the end, the poet-narrator seems to reiterate the elusiveness of fulfilling one's longing.

D. ELDER

### **Ballade to the Moon**

Daniel Elder is a young contemporary American composer whose choral works are immensely popular in the US and championed by the likes of Eric Whitacre. His music is at once lyrical and textural, with roots in the impressionist movement. *Ballade to the Moon* is the first in Elder's *Three Nocturnes*, a sumptuous work for the mixed-voice choir set to an original text by the composer that reveals his deep sense of wonder and joy for nature prompted by a moonlit walk. The night calls out to him to "*Come, dream in me*", and as the walker finds himself under deep forest cover he entreats the stars, "*O share thy light!*", and lures them to "*Come, sing with me!*".

The composer himself explains:

*"Ballade" depicts a narrator's moonlit walk through woods and fields as he explores his love for everything around him. The beauty comes in its obscurity, as at many times the narrator could be referring to either nature or a romantic attraction in his life. The night seems to call to him, "Come, dream in me!" and as he finds himself under deep forest cover, he entreats the stars, "O share thy light!" until the twinkling stars in open meadow gleam upon him, luring them to "Come, sing with me!" His love for the dusky beauty around him causes him to "weep with joy" with the moon as his only witness.*

M. LAURIDSEN

### **Dirait-on**

*Dirait-on* is the concluding song, but the first to be composed (originally as a stand-alone song), of the 5-piece song cycle called "*Les Chansons des Roses*" (the song of the roses) by one of America's most favourite choral composers, Morten Lauridsen, based on a beautiful poem in French by the great twentieth-century German poet Rainer Maria Rilke.

The composer writes that he designed his music to complement Rilke's blend of "primarily light, joyous, and playful" characteristics and to "capture the delicate beauty and sensuousness" of the French poems; he specifically recommended to us that:

*"[singers should pay attention to] the flexible tempo required and the tone should be light".*

One of Lauridsen's most popular songs, *Dirait-on* evokes the simple and melodious style of a *chanson populaire* (or French folksong), with its repeated refrain, "*dirait-on*" ("so they say").

FRENCH MELODY / D. ELDER

### **Twinkle, twinkle, little star**

The tune we know today as "twinkle, twinkle, little star" actually originates as the popular children's song in France, "*Ah! Vous dirai-je, maman*". In English, the "alphabet song", "Baa, baa, black sheep" as well as "twinkle, twinkle, little star" are based on this tune, while the German Christmas carol, "Morgen kommt der Weihnachtsmann" also uses the melody. However, the English text itself is from the poem called "The star" from the "Rhymes for the nursery" written by Jane Taylor; the original text in French translates into something quite different:

*Ah! Will I tell you, Mommy  
What is tormenting me?  
Daddy wants me to reason  
Like a grown up person  
Me, I say that sweets  
Are worth more than reason.*

While it originates as a nursery rhyme, the "twinkle, twinkle, little star" melody has great pedigree: even Mozart has written 12 variations on the melody for the piano (K265). Elder's 2013 *a cappella* arrangement based on the French melody setting and the English text that all of us know is simple but beautiful. We think we are giving the Hong Kong first performance of this piece.

We love that the piece ends in a rather unusual chord – the dominant chord (A major) to the piece's key, D major.

Text to songs (with English translations)

**Saint-Saëns - Ave Verum**

Ave verum corpus natum  
 De Maria virgine  
 Vere passum immolatum  
 In cruce pro homine  
 Cuius latus perforatum  
 Unda fluxit et sanguine  
 Esto nobis praegustatum  
 In mortis examine. [Amen]

**Saint-Saëns - Calme des nuits**

Calme des nuits, fraîcheur des soirs,  
 Vaste scintillement des mondes,  
 Grand silence des antres noirs  
 Vous charmez les âmes profondes.  
 L'éclat du soleil, la gaieté,  
 Le bruit plaisent aux plus futiles;  
 Le poète seul est hanté  
 Par l'amour des choses tranquilles.

**Ešenvalds - O Salutaris Hostia**

O salutaris Hostia,  
 Quæ cæli pandis ostium:  
 Bella premunt hostilia,  
 Da robur, fer auxilium.  
 Uni trinoque Domino  
 Sit sempiterna gloria,  
 Qui vitam sine termino  
 Nobis donet in patria. Amen.

**Ešenvalds - Only in Sleep**

Only in sleep I see their faces,  
 Children I played with when I was a child,  
 Louise comes back with her brown hair braided,  
 Annie with ringlets warm and wild.  
 Only in sleep Time is forgotten —  
 What may have come to them, who can know?  
 Yet we played last night as long ago,  
 And the doll-house stood at the turn of the stair.  
 The years had not sharpened their smooth round  
 faces,  
 I met their eyes and found them mild —  
 Do they, too, dream of me, I wonder,  
 And for them am I too a child?

**Stroope - I am not yours**

I am not yours, not lost in you,  
 Not lost, although I long to be  
 Lost as a candle lit at noon,  
 Lost as a snowflake in the sea.  
 You love me, and I find you still  
 A spirit beautiful and bright,  
 Yet I am I, who long to be  
 Lost as a light is lost in light.  
 Oh plunge me deep in love - put out  
 My senses, leave me deaf and blind,  
 Swept by the tempest of your love,  
 A taper in a rushing wind.

**Saint-Saëns - Ave Verum**

Hail the true body, born  
 of the Virgin Mary:  
 You who truly suffered and were sacrificed  
 on the cross for the sake of man.  
 From whose pierced flank  
 flowed water and blood:  
 Be a foretaste for us  
 in the trial of death. [Amen]

**Saint-Saëns - Quiet of the night**

Quiet nights, cool evenings  
 Vast shimmering worlds  
 Silence of black dens  
 You charm the deep souls.  
 The brightness of the sun, the gaiety,  
 The sound appealing to most futile;  
 Only the poet is possessed  
 For the love of quiet things.

**Ešenvalds - O Salutaris Hostia**

O saving Victim, opening wide  
 The gate of Heaven to us below;  
 Our foes press hard on every side;  
 Thine aid supply; thy strength bestow.  
 To thy great name be endless praise,  
 Immortal Godhead, One in Three.  
 O grant us endless length of days,  
 In our true native land with thee. Amen.

### **Elder - Ballade to the moon**

On moonlit night I wander free,  
my mind to roam on thoughts of thee.  
With midnight darkness beckoning  
my heart toward mystic fantasy:

Come, dream in me!

How beautiful, this night in June!  
And here, upon the velvet dune,  
I weep with joy beneath the moon.

The path lies dark before my sight,  
and yet my feet with pure delight  
trod onward through the darkened vale,  
beneath the starry sky so bright.

O share thy light!

These woods, their weary wanderer soon  
in awe and fearful wonder swoon;  
I weep with joy beneath the moon.

And as the darkened hours flee,  
my heart beats ever rapidly.  
Though heavy hangs my eyes with sleep,  
my singing soul, it cries to thee:

Come sing with me!

The twinkling sky casts forth its tune:  
O must I leave thy charms so soon?  
I weep with joy beneath the moon.

### **Lauridsen - Dirait-on**

Abandon entouré d'abandon,  
tendresse touchant aux tendresses...  
C'est ton intérieur qui sans cesse  
se caresse, dirait-on;

se caresse en soi-même,  
par son propre reflet éclairé.  
Ainsi tu inventes le thème  
du Narcisse exaucé.

### **Lauridsen - So they say**

Abandon upon abandon,  
Tenderness upon tenderness ...  
Your hidden self unceasingly  
Turns inward, a caress;

caressing itself, in and of its own  
reflection illuminated.  
Thus you've invented the tale  
of Narcissus sated.

### **French melody / Elder - Twinkle, twinkle, little star**

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,  
how I wonder what you are.  
Up above the world so high,  
like a diamond in the sky.

In the dark blue sky you keep,  
often through my curtains peep,  
For you never shut your eye,  
Til the sun is in the sky.

We would like to acknowledge the generous support of Tom Lee Music for providing a Steinway model B221 for this concert.

## Introducing the ensemble singers and our invited soprano

*The singers for this concert include the trio of Florence, Sylvia and Julia who have wonderful memories of singing together at the same school that Arthur is a specially low-voiced alumni singer; Freddie and Leonard have either formally studied music or are about to do so; Cecilia sang with Sylvia a few years back while Donald is a new and musically versatile friend of the singers. They are business people and professionals engaged in various walks of life but share a love of singing; Sylvia currently provides artistic direction.*

*While we have probably sung in 20 different ensembles and choirs all combined and some of us take on solo parts once in a while too, we are excited to be coming together to do small-scale ensemble singing, to find a blended sound, and to present a beautiful programme.*

*We are also excited to share part of this journey with a young talent in Hong Kong, Zoe Yu, who at the age of 12 has already won a number of singing prizes including at the Hong Kong Children Art Festival and has many performances under her belt including as little Fanny Crosby in the charity concert The life and Songs of Fanny Crosby in 2015. Zoe was the first soprano soloist for the Hong Kong Children's Choir in the O Salutaris Hostia piece she performed with us tonight.*

*Mr Jimmy Chan – who taught more than a few of us - generously provided encouragement and guidance at a critical juncture.*

*Thank you to our invited soloist Zoe Yu, to Kenix Tsang for vocal coaching assistance, and to Wingman Leung for repetiteur support.*

### **Soprano**

Sylvia Chan\*\*\*\*

Florence Chang

Zoe Yu\*\*\*\*

### **Alto**

Cecilia The\*

Julia Yan\*\*\*\*

### **Tenor**

Freddie Tsang

### **Bass**

Donald Chan\*\*

Leonard Ma

Arthur Wong\*\*\*

\* Only for part 1 of the programme.

\*\* Tenor 2 for Esenvalds pieces.

\*\*\* Esenvalds only.

\*\*\*\* Soloist.

**THE**  **Sing as**  
**CLASSICAL**   
= exemplary  **though**  
setting a  **high**  **standard**  
**SINGERS** **heaven**  
= sheer joy in choral music-  
making **is on earth.**

**W**e are delighted to hear from talented singers and supporters. Information about The Classical Singers and our 2018 and 2019 programmes can be obtained from [info@theclassicalsingers.com](mailto:info@theclassicalsingers.com). You can also learn more at [www.facebook.com/theclassicalsingers](https://www.facebook.com/theclassicalsingers) and [www.theclassicalsingers.com](http://www.theclassicalsingers.com). A statement of our constitution and objectives is at [www.theclassicalsingers.com/contact-us/our-constitution-and-objectives](http://www.theclassicalsingers.com/contact-us/our-constitution-and-objectives).