written in the stars ...

looking out to the stars ....

Lost in the stars that are aligned

counting the stars ...

wishing upon the stars ....

OLGA STEZHKO *piano*

SYLVIA CHAN *piano and songs*

Dame Professor **JOCELYN BELL BURNELL** *reciting poems*

16 December 2019, 8pm,
Trinity College Chapel, Cambridge

Part of the Reach for the Stars. *Series.*

Introduction to The Classical Group and the "Reach for the stars" series

The Classical Group was launched in 2016 as a non-profit organisation with a mission to create original concert programs that enable people to engage with music, be inspired by the music as well as the poetry and the stories, and to be spurred to discover and rediscover works of exceptional musical qualities.

*With the motto "**brought together by beautiful music**", the group currently has a mixed-voice, small-group ensemble, The Classical Singers, which is based in Hong Kong and has operated as an 8- and 6-voice ensemble performing the works of composers from Mozart, Fauré, Brahms and Saint-Saëns to Ešenvalds, Lauridsen and Elder, giving first performances on 2 occasions, and in a number of venues internationally, collaborating also with a number of world-class musicians and solo performers. The musicians have various backgrounds: a few have played and sung for and continue to be connected with the Oxford and Cambridge colleges while others have made a series of solo appearances.*

*In 2019 the group launched the "**Reach for the stars**" series to pursue its interest in how our world around us have inspired music and artistic ideas and how musicians and artists have reacted to the discoveries in and in some cases presaged scientific developments. The group also held a "Hear the song in the music" concert with guest pianist Balázs Szokolay at Trinity's Chapel in November 2018 that celebrates songs and song-inspired piano music.*

*This evening's concert is the first in our "Reach for the Stars" concert series; we are delighted to be **celebrating the sciences and arts of stars - bright and dark, little and big, living, lost, sparkling, bursting, remembered**.*

*A **special "limited edition" collection of poems about stars** is being launched at this concert.*

Olga Stezhko - pianist (*Debussy, Scriabin*), songs

Olga Stezhko is an award-winning concert pianist, recording artist and leading interpreter of early and mid-20th century piano repertoire, and is particularly distinguished in Scriabin and Debussy. She made her debut on the stage of the Minsk National Opera House at the age of eight and since then continues to make great strides on the international concert circuit.

Acclaimed by Classical Source as "a supremely delicate master of her instrument" who possesses "an extraordinary presence" for her performance in a Wigmore Hall recital, Olga has played at premier venues including Barbican Hall, Salle Cortot and Carnegie Hall, both as a soloist and in recital, with recent appearances at Palermo Classica Festival, Leeds International Concert Season, amongst others.

Born in Minsk, Belarus, Olga is based in London. She completed her Bachelor's and Master's degrees with distinction at the Royal Academy of Music under Ian Fountain after winning some of the UK's most prestigious scholarships, including the Myra Hess Scholarship and the Philharmonia Orchestra/Martin Musical Scholarship Fund Award.

Olga has a passion for astrophysics and her debut album "Eta Carinae", with music by Scriabin and Busoni, was hailed by Gramophone Magazine as "an outstanding debut" and "not a record for the faint-hearted but rather for those who enjoy dark and menacing regions of the mind". Her second album "Et la lune descend" was released in 2018 to mark the centenary of Debussy's death.

Sylvia Chan - pianist (*Bach-Marcello, Franck, Rachmaninoff*), songs, producer

Sylvia was a prizewinning pianist in open competition while growing up in Hong Kong and the UK, and performed as a solo pianist and in a duo with cellist Miriam Kirby (The Hague String Trio), including in St John's Smith Square, London, West Road Concert Hall, Cambridge, and recorded as a soloist (Bach, Brahms and Liszt).

Sylvia studied the piano with Eleanor Wong (Academy of Performing Arts) in Hong Kong and Christopher Elton (Royal Academy of Music) in London, also taking lessons from Hamish Milne (also in London). She also received individual voice training since a young age and later went on to study with British baritone Nigel Wickens in Cambridge, singing in a number of prizewinning choirs and ensembles when growing up and performing in a number of professional opera productions in the UK.

2018 marked Sylvia's first "return" solo piano performance after more than 15 years away when she gave her last recital in Trinity College Chapel in a programme with Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Chopin, Liszt, Brahms, and Ravel; this evening she comes back with a focus on similar stalwarts of the Classical and Romantic period. Sylvia dreams about yet-to-be-explored concert programmes and bringing disparate ideas together, and brings her piano, vocal and chamber training and background in realizing this concert series.

Away from music, she enjoys a career in investment management and entrepreneurship with a focus on technologies; she is author of 2 books and has a PhD from the University of Cambridge; recent activities include a project researching into the transferable skills, mindsets and habits of intensively trained musicians to business and professional life.

Introduction to the concert programme

Written in the stars, lost in the stars, listening to stars, looking out to the stars, counting the stars, wishing for the stars to appear, align, coalesce ... We humans have always had a love of, interest in and curiosity about "stars"; we have ascribed various significance and much meaning and hopes onto them too! We have sought out Pleiades, we were so excited to land on the Moon, we were intrigued with the idea of an ever-expanding universe, and we built interferometers with mile-long arms at 90 degrees to each other that finally recorded gravitational waves in 2015!

Maybe our sense of connection with stars comes from them being "brothers" and "sisters" to our planet Earth - little stars, big stars, brightly shining stars, sparkling and twinkling stars, starkly dark stars, living stars, exploding stars; and as with our brothers and sisters, we have changing and multi-layered relationships with stars.

In the first part of this evening's programme, we start with music that reflects a broad concept of a "celestial" world that embodies laws, with none other than the composer whose music is often seen as the epitome of heavenly symmetry; J S Bach's transcription of a popular Adagio written for the oboe by his contemporary Alessandro Marcello (**Bach-Marcello,**

Adagio) can only be described as a heavenly piece, and we couple it with another piece in the "heavenly beauty" category by César Franck transcribed by H. Bauer (**Franck-Bauer, Prelude, Fugue and Variation**). Both pieces have many ascending and descending stepwise progressions that sound like climbing up and down the stairs to the cosmic "heaven"; we are also reminded of Chopin's comment that Bach "is an astronomer, discovering the most marvellous stars". As humanity discovered more about the laws of the planets around us, we find music that reflects a greater consciousness of the (less static and constantly evolving) universe around us, as can be heard in **Scriabin's Preludes Op.74** as well as **Vers la flamme** that is almost audibly about a star spinning and exploding on itself.

After a short break, we move to the second part of the programme that speaks about stars, with words of English and French poets that are at times moving, at times fascinating. In these songs, we hear about the hopes we project onto stars, and we reflect on and are reminded of how we identify stars with so many different things. Stars spur memories of past loves (**Debussy, Nuit d'étoiles**), their rays stream from afar to touch our eyes (**Gounod, Le soir**), they speak to us about finding our way (**Weill, Lost in the stars**), but sometimes cajole us to impossible follies (**Weill, Youkali**), and finally the iridescent stars of the evening bring us a calm that is a perfect moment to dream (**Hahn, L'heure exquise**).

After the intermission, we continue to the third and final part of the programme, where we celebrate two specific scientific achievements: first, mankind's landing on the Moon, 50 years ago in 1969 - and there is probably no better piece of music conjuring up the Moon than **Debussy's Clair de lune** - and more recently and to follow, mankind's first time hearing two stars (more specifically, two black holes) colliding, for which **Rachmaninoff's Prelude in D (Op.23, no 4)** has a special meaning to us because it starts with a low D that is very close to the audible frequency of 75Hz which is the orbital frequency of the two colliding stars in 2015. In between we juxtapose a piece of music about Pleiades **– To a disappeared Pleiade** - by contemporary Japanese composer **Takashi Yoshimatsu** who wrote many pleiade dances for the piano.

We finish with a second impressionistic piece about the moon from **Debussy**, this time the **Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut** from Book II of Images and **Scriabin's last piano sonata** (**piano sonata 10**) that can be described as the "kisses of the sun" sonata.

Accompanying the present programme notes is a small collection of poems (Shakespeare, Goethe, Hugo, Frost, Verlaine, Teasdale and others). We hope it may inspire you to imagine more, to reach for more, to ask more questions.

Here below are thoughts and ideas that have informed this evening's concert and choice of pieces.

I. Thinking about stars / thoughts about stars

What do stars mean to us?

We see stars, we think about stars, we wonder if stars represent people, we worry about stars burning, we feel lost (even oppressed?) when we can't find stars in the sky, we count them, we think of the distance but feel close to them nonetheless, we even identify with a star, we think of our loved ones when we see stars, and some of us have conversations with stars.

Stars inspire us to think of many things: our dreams, our loves, our long-lost or more recently departed loved ones, the vastness of our world, our hopes, our inevitable mortality, and many more.

Stars are important to us human souls. We call our high performers super-stars (and not super-planets or super-suns), we are awed by star power, and as kids we all learned the nursery rhyme "twinkle, twinkle, little star".

We are mesmerized by stars.

Stars mean a lot to us!

II. Listening to the stars

Like Einstein and many other scientists before and after, we feel we hear the sound of the universe, and like even Plato, sometimes when we hear music we feel we are experiencing the beauty of the universe.

There is our solar system, the sun, the moon, the stars, and the planets, and then there is much beyond it. The question of "what" and "how" is of interest to physicists, astrophysicists, cosmologists, and so on.

The interest started early: the ancients were already recording the positions of planets in the heavens as well as the periodicity of the moon's movements, keeping up-to-date star catalogs and laying the foundations for the latitudes and longitudes we know today. It took some time for scientists to be united around the view that the earth is only a very small planet in a massive universe where many things were still unknown and essentially unknowable. It was only in the last 100 years or so, as a number of scientific instruments such as the telescope were being invented and rendered the invisible visible, that we have discovered that many stars were moving at high speeds in the universe, that the universe is expanding (and not "eternal" or "unchanging"), and so on.

It is interesting certainly that at times through history poets have spoken of ideas that later were confirmed by scientific research; in his final work, the prose poem named "Eureka", published in 1848, one year before he died, the American poet Edgar Allan Poe imagined the universe as restless and evolving:

> *Were the succession of stars endless, then the background of the sky would present us an uniform luminosity, like that displayed by the Galaxy -- since there could be absolutely no point, in all that background, at which would not exist a star. The only mode, therefore, in which, under such a state of affairs, we could comprehend the voids which our telescopes find in innumerable directions, would be by supposing the distance of the invisible background so immense that no ray from it has yet been able to reach us at all. That this may be so, who shall venture to deny? I maintain, simply, that we have not even the shadow of a reason for believing that it is so.*

Not only have nations devised telescopes and observatories to try to learn more about our universe, scientists have also been building "listeners" to the stars. And it was in September 2015 when finally the world of science went abuzz with the news of the first-ever detection of "gravitational waves" that was long predicted by Albert Einstein's 1915 theory of relativity, almost exactly 100 years ago. Gravitational waves from the collision of 2 black holes were detected at both the LIGOs in Hanford, Washington and in Livingston, Louisiana in the US (the event is called "GW150914"). Not only were waves detected but the measured data supported what was predicted by theory; it was estimated that the 2 black holes were about 29 and 36 times the mass of the sun, and the collision took place 1.3 billion years ago, with about 3 times the mass of the sun being converted into gravitational waves. The 2017 Nobel Prize for Physics was awarded to the 3 physicists for "decisive contributions to the LIGO detector and the observation of gravitational waves".

III. We are all made of stardust

We also came to realise that we are all literally "made of stardust".

Science tells us that almost every element on Earth was formed at the heart of a star.

In fact, while stars at a distance seem to be twinkling in the night sky, closely observed reveal many tumultuous chemical reactions they play host to. It is easy to forget that stars owe their light to the energy released by nuclear fusion reactions at their cores, the very same reactions which created chemical elements like carbon or iron - the building blocks which make up the world around us.

First there was hydrogen, the simplest and lightest chemical element: after the Big Bang, tiny particles bound together to form this. As time went on, young stars formed when clouds of gas and dust gathered under the effect of gravity, heating up as they became denser. At the stars' cores, bathed in temperatures of over 10 million degrees C, hydrogen and then helium nuclei fuse to form heavier elements, a reaction known as nucleosynthesis.

It is this reaction that convert lighter elements into heavier ones. Relatively young stars like our Sun convert hydrogen to produce helium, just like the first stars of our universe. Once they run out of hydrogen, they begin to transform helium into beryllium and carbon (going up the Periodic Table). As these heavier nuclei are produced, they too are burnt inside stars to synthesise heavier and heavier elements. Different sized stars play host to different fusion reactions, eventually forming everything from oxygen to iron to beyond.

And it is during a supernova, when a massive star explodes at the end of its life, when the resulting high energy environment enables the creation of some of the heaviest elements including iron and nickel. The explosion also disperses the different elements across the universe, scattering the stardust which now makes up planets including Earth.

The story of how stars live and die and how our Earth was formed as a result of these activities is very much a story of scientific pursuits and discoveries of the last 100 years; **Scriabin's 5 Preludes in Op.74** were written in 1914 right before scientists were able to formally theorize how stars form, develop and die and yet, the music provokes a very strong visual and semantic association with the physical processes in the cosmos. Olga, who plays Scriabin at tonight's concert, links every prelude with a particular cosmic phenomenon:

> *"No.1 is a nebula - a vast cloud of gas and dust from which future stars will be born. No.2 has a fluctuating dual harmony at its base that she associates with the quantum property of an electron (wave-particle duality). No.3 is the beginning of the gravitational collapse of a molecular cloud into a protostar. No.4 is a white dwarf - the remnants of a star similar in mass to our Sun after it completely burns out its fuel supply. No.5 is a red giant - the later stage of stellar evolution preceding the white dwarf phase: after hydrogen in the star's core is exhausted and thermonuclear fusion begins in a shell around the core, the star violently expands, swallowing its surrounding planets in the process."*

IV. "Lost in the stars"

From quantum physics to poetry ….

Stars colliding and merging and collapsing also reflects our ideas, our journeys, our relationships.

Many poets have been inspired by stars and written wonderful poems that frame our thinking and express our emotions about stars.

On a starlit night, the poet is reminded of his lost loves (**Debussy, *Nuit d'étoiles***) (*Triste lyre, qui soupire, Je rêve aux amours défunts* [Sad lyre that sighs, I dream of bygone loves]), but he is equally instilled by new hopes and calm enlightenment.

And then, there are the stars that you follow but lead you to an illusory world (**Weill, *Youkali***) ("*Mais c'est un rêve, une folie, Il n'y a pas de Youkali*" [But this is a dream, a folly, There is no Youkali]!)?

Perhaps stars are just allegories for us people.

And perhaps some of us who burn brightly run the risk of burning ourselves and exploding a little too soon.

As expressed by the character Stephen in the wonderful "**Lost in the stars**", the title song from Kurt Weill's musical tragedy Lost in the Stars, adapted by Maxwell Anderson from Alan Paton's novel Cry, the Beloved Country that is itself about the politics of Apartheid, it is of all things about "little stars, big stars", all "lost":

And we're lost out here in the stars
Little stars and big stars
Blowing through the night
And we're lost out here in the stars
Little stars and big stars
Blowing through the night
And we're lost out here in the stars

V. Follow the star …. stars aligned ….

But then, sometimes stars align! And when stars align, the lost is "made whole" again, and we find ourselves all over again.

And so, after being long lost, after at times dishearteningly long wanders in search of something, we find what we have been looking for and the stars align (again).

Perhaps it is on both those counts that this concert came about. The stars aligned, because we have 2 star-related scientific events to celebrate: first, the year 2019 is the 50th anniversary of Man's landing on the Moon (the Moon is a star); and second, the detection of gravitational waves is a most exciting recent scientific milestone that culminates from a series of increasingly sophisticated efforts to detect and listen to the "music of the spheres") (literally so for us, as the 75 Hz was a very significant frequency for the waves which happens to be a "low D" … which we have associated it with **Rachmaninoff's Prelude in D** that starts with that note). (Note how the energy from the collision of black holes not come out as light but as sound – so we can *hear* but not see them – furthermore, as one of the originators of the LIGO that was the instrument that detected the gravitational waves had said, "LIGO **covers the same frequency range as the piano**" ….).

The two pianists in this concert also were brought together via their shared interest in stars and the marvel they have for soundscapes that reflect cosmic and visual brilliance – some wonderful examples being **Debussy's Clair de lune and Scriabin's piano sonatas** (in a performance of the *Andante* from his own sonata #3, Scriabin is said to have exclaimed: "*Here the stars are singing!*"), and contemporary Japanese composer Yoshimatsu's ode to some of the nearest star clusters to Earth, **To a disappeared pleiade.**

Twinkle, twinkle. Can you hear the stars singing?

Notes on the music

J. S. BACH (after A. Marcello)
"Adagio" from Concerto for the oboe in D minor BWV 974 (1715)

Alessandro Marcello is a Venetian philosopher, mathematician and composer who died the same year as J. S. Bach. His D minor oboe concerto reflects the familiar language of the Baroque though it is today probably the only one of his musical works that is performed regularly; the Adagio (2nd movement) is notable for its upwardly spiraling theme and lyrical beauty.

The great and greatly prolific composer J.S. Bach arranged the music of a number of other composers including concertos by Venetian composers during his Weimar Period (1708–17), with this poignant example being based on an oboe concerto attributed to Marcello and intended for the harpsichord; the result is a sublime and almost timeless piece of music, the background chords gently pulsing on the left hand as the right hand expresses itself beautifully.

C. FRANCK (transcribed by H. Bauer)
Prélude, Fugue and Variation, Op.18 (original 1860-2; arr.1910)

César Franck is a Belgium-born composer, pianist, organist, and music teacher who lived in Paris for most of his life and presided as chief organist at the magnificent Cavaillé-Coll organ in the Church of Ste-Clotilde for many years in the second half of the 19th century. Franck wrote two three-part, triptych pieces – quasi-sonatas - that are loved by keyboard players: The *Prélude*, *Choral and Fugue* (M.21), written for the piano, as well as the *Prélude*, *Fugue and Variation* (M.18), written for the harmonium and piano and with an arrangement for the organ, both having a third movement in addition to the *Prélude* and the *Fugue*, and both in B minor and with an ending in B major.

Op. 18 is dedicated to his contemporary, French composer and fellow organist Camille Saint-Saëns; the dedication does not imply any portrait, but the balance and clarity of Op. 18 indeed suggest Saint-Saëns's classical orientation. In addition, the substantial fugue of this piece is clearly influenced by Franck's thorough study of the music of J. S. Bach. The piece intricately works fugal elements into a classical form and adapts these to the aesthetics of the modern Romantic organ.

The haunting and romantic oboe melody of the pastoral *Prélude* is a typical Franckian theme – with many stepwise progressions, both upwards and downwards, as if running up and down the scale and as if reaching up to the heavens.

It is a lesser-known fact that Franck actually wrote the piece originally for the harmonium and the piano and then transcribed it for the organ. This piano transcription is by the early 20th century British pianist Harold Bauer.

A. SCRIABIN
5 Preludes, Op.74 (1914)

Op 74 (1914) is the last completed work of Scriabin (before his sudden death at the age of 43); it starts with a marking of "heart-rending" of no 1, repeatedly returning to the same wrenching dissonance, continuing onto no 2 where the bass never leaves Scriabin's tonal centre of F sharp ("Here is fatigue, exhaustion … all eternity, millions of years …") and ending with a great descent of the no 5, intended to be so affirmative, as if thumping out a tremendous question, although Scriabin wrote no 2 (marked *Très lent, 8ontemplative* (very slow, contemplating)) last.

Olga links every prelude with a particular cosmic phenomenon related to the life cycle of stars:

"No.1 is a nebula – a vast cloud of gas and dust from which future stars will be born. No.2 has a fluctuating dual harmony at its base that she associates with the quantum property of an electron (wave-particle duality). No.3 is the beginning of the gravitational collapse of a molecular cloud into a protostar. No.4 is a white dwarf – the remnants of a star similar in mass to our Sun after it completely burns out its fuel supply. No.5 is a red giant – the later stage of stellar evolution preceding the white dwarf phase: after hydrogen in the star's core is exhausted and thermonuclear fusion begins in a shell around the core, the star violently expands, swallowing its surrounding planets in the process."

A. SCRIABIN
Vers la flamme, Op.72 (1914)

The "piano poem" *Vers la flamme* (Towards the flame) is among the last works that Scriabin composed. It is an aural imagining of the world moving slowly and inexorably "towards the flame", heating up until it is finally consumed in a great conflagration of fire and light. The harmonies are based on chromatically modified dominant 9th, 11th and 13th chords, spaced in fourths rather than thirds. The effects of the tritones (augmented 4ths / diminished 5ths) give an impression of time standing still. Around 5 minutes into the piece are deep bass rumblings in a 5-against-9 rhythm, followed by the arrival of the "flames" in the treble when double tremolos curl around the middle register, eventually breaking out into silvery flashes of brilliance above until the piece ends in a dazzling aural snapshot of pure white light.

A SELECTION OF SONGS ABOUT STARS (interspersed with poetry readings)
Nuit d'etoiles (Debussy), Le soir (Gounod), Youkali (Weill), Lost in the stars (Weill), L'heure exquise (Hahn)

Debussy's ***Nuit d'etoiles*** - his first published song – was written in 1880 when he was only 18 years old. This is a song that sits squarely within the French Romanticism tradition rather than the later Debussy's impressionist style.

The poem is by Théodore de Banville: the setting is the poet sitting beneath a starry night sky, lyre in hand, and singing of a long-lost love. The song is in an ABABA musical form: the melodic line is simple and classical, while the piano varies with arpeggios in the 1st time the refrain comes back and elegant falling triplet figures the second time.

Gounod's ***Le soir*** is a serene and beautiful song about the night and stars. Based on the poem of Lamartine's celebrated *Meditations poétiques* that was also a major influence on Franz Liszt (for example, in his *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* for the piano, which is dedicated to the poet), *Le soir* is a quintessential Gounod song; only a composer capable of writing long melodies can match the length of Lamartine's spacious metres. The calm of the evening is established at the outset by the piano, and we encounter in this song the qualities of charm, ingenuity, and a concern for the literary text that are the classic qualities of the French *mélodie*.

"What might have been banal in other hands achieves here a nobility of utterance which matches the poet's own definition of his work – '*classique pour l'expression, romantique dans la pensée*'", wrote accomplished pianist of songs, *mélodies* and lieder Graham Johnson. Indeed, Gounod was cited by Ravel as "the true founder of the *mélodie* in France"; his influence is to be heard in the songs of Bizet, Saint-Saëns, Fauré and Massenet and many others.

Kurt Weill's ***Youkali*** is a song describing our search for a world "out there" that alludes to a guiding star that has deserted us and does not exist; it thus presents a very different attitude to stars. It is musically very different too: in fact, it was originally not a song but a "tango habanera" that was written for a music theatre piece entitled Marie Galante, composed soon after Weill, a German Jew, had fled Nazi Germany and settled in Paris in 1933. It was only in 1946 that Weill inserted the words by Roger Fernay, about the search for an illusory place, Youkali, "the land of our desires, it's happiness, it's pleasure", "where you leave all your troubles behind", but is only "a dream" and "a folly".

Lost in the stars is not about following a star but being lost out there in the stars; it is the title song from the 1949 opera-musical by Kurt Weill and the adaptation by Maxwell Anderson that is based on Alan Paton's novel Cry the Beloved Country set in apartheid South Africa where the protagonist, Stephen, is a black Anglican priest from a small village whose son has been jailed after killing a white man during a robbery.

> *"And sometimes it seems maybe God's gone away / Forgetting the promise that we've heard him say*
> *And we're lost out here in the stars …"*

Anderson's adaptation loses much of Paton's prose but highlights very well the novel's theme of seeking and finding; the music itself represents some of Weill's last composed works.

We finish with Reynaldo Hahn's ***L'heure exquise*** that is based on a poem by Paul Verlaine, and is one of his best known songs. Published in 1892, it is the 5th in a group of 7 songs entitled *Chansons grises* (Gray songs). Nothing happens, there is simply the moonlight, a pool reflecting it, the winds weeping, and an exquisite moment.

And so we have Debussy's Starry night when thoughts turned to a long-lost love whose eyes are like the stars, Gounod's star of love found at the poet's feet and the evening star's rays softly touching his eyes, Weill's star we follow to the Youkali that does not exist and is only a "folly", and our fate that is to be lost in the stars, little and big. And finally we find the moon and the iridescent stars that portends the time to dream and the most exquisite hour (and what a perfect moment for an intermission).

C. DEBUSSY
Clair de Lune, from Suite Bergamasque (1890)

Debussy's *Clair de lune*, the most famous movement of his *Suite Bergamasque*, an early work, begins with a muted minor third in the left hand that is repeated an octave higher in the right, representing the first glimmer of moonlight, with the piece's harmonies remaining so equivocal that it is not until the low D flat in the left hand in the ninth bar that it reveals its tonality.

Clair de Lune is the third movement in the 4-movement suite: it comes after a *Prelude* and a *Minuet* and is followed by a concluding *Passepied*. Originally titled "*Promenade sentimentale*", it can be considered to take its place as the "*sarabande*" of innumerable Baroque dance suites—a slow dance in triple meter with a slight emphasis on the second beat of the measure.

Debussy explicitly refers to the inspiration by a famous poem of the same name by Paul Verlaine, with this opening verse:

> *"Votre âme est un paysage choisi / Que vont charmant masques et bergamasques*
> *Jouant du luth et dansant et quasi / Tristes sous leurs déguisements fantasques."*
>
> *["Your soul is a select landscape / Where charming masqueraders and bergamaskers go*
> *Playing the lute and dancing and almost / Sad under their fantastic disguises."]*

T. YOSHIMATSU (吉松隆)
Piano folio … to a disappeared pleiade (1997)

Contemporary Japanese composer Takashi Yoshimatsu wrote a large number of Pleiades Dances for the piano, from Book I (1986) to Book IX (2001), almost all inspired by the seven stars of Pleiades as well as the music of Bach's inventions. In

the words of the composer, these are "*a newly conceived set of preludes for the modern piano which takes its material from the seven colours of the rainbow, the seven pitches of church modes, and seven metrical units ranging from three to nine beats expressed intention of creating a new form of the modern prelude*".

"To a disappeared Pleiade" is not in any of these Books but can be seen as a companion piece to these sets of pieces. The Pleiades are a star cluster in the constellation Taurus. The Japanese name for this cluster is Subaru.

Yoshimatsu did not start out studying music; in fact, he was a professor of technology initially, before quitting to join a band. His classical compositions are heavily influenced by jazz, progressive rock, traditional Japanese music, and electronic music, and he proposes a "new lyricism".

S. RACHMANINOFF
Prelude, Op.23, no.4 (D major) (1903)

Unlike Chopin, who composed the 24 Preludes of his Op. 28 in one fell swoop, Rachmaninoff took 18 years to bring his 24 Preludes – including 10 Preludes in Op. 23 (1903), 13 Preludes in Op. 32 (1911), and one (the Op.3, no 2) – to completion.

Unlike Chopin's set, the order of the pieces are not organized by key; the nocturne-like character of Prelude Op.23, no 4, in D major and marked *Andante cantabile*, has led some to call it a song without words.

The Prelude begins with a D in the left-hand; Sylvia was learning this Prelude when she learned of the first detection of gravitational waves, that the sound wave was in the audible range, with 75 Hz (closest in pitch to D2 on the piano) being significant in this event. (More details: the signal lasted just over 0.2 seconds and increased in frequency and amplitude in about 8 cycles from 35 Hz to 250 Hz [an audible range]. The orbital frequency of the 2 black holes when they merged was 75 Hz, and at maximum amplitude, the waves were around 150Hz.)

C. DEBUSSY
Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut, from Images Book II (1907)

The kind of scene Debussy had in mind in the second set of *Images* was not one that a painter could set down on canvas but one with sounds or at least movements associated with it.

Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut (And the moon sets over the temple that is no more) – a title chosen because the composer liked its oriental associations and its alexandrine rhythm – is about the sounds that emerge as the light of the moon, represented by the bright dissonances of the opening bars, descends on the scene, evoking the shape of the temple in parallel harmonies and percussive melody. The pieces in Book II of *Images* are more abstract than those in Book I; as its title suggests, this piece is almost about an experience that leaves imprints in our souls.

A. SCRIABIN
Piano Sonata no 10, Op.70 in C major (1913)

The Russian composer Alexander Scriabin wrote his Piano Sonata No. 10, Op. 70, in 1913. It was his final work in this form. The piece is highly chromatic and atonal like Scriabin's other late works, although arguably less dissonant than most of his late works. It is generally considered one of Scriabin's masterpieces and is in a highly compressed sonata-form structure, preceded by a slow introduction, and as the sonata progresses, its harmony is restless, constantly surging forward, increasingly overlaid with layers of shimmering, structurally important, trills – to the point where the work was known among the composer's friends as the Trill Sonata. The music climaxes with what Scriabin referred to as "blinding light, as if the sun had come too close"; Scriabin has referred to his Tenth Sonata "*a sonata of insects. Insects are born from the sun [...] they are the kisses of the sun.*"

Text to songs (with English translations)

Debussy - Nuit d'étoiles
* Nuit d'étoiles, sous tes voiles,
sous ta brise et tes parfums,
Triste lyre qui soupire,
je rêve aux amours défunts.

La sereine mélancolie vient éclore
au fond de mon coeur,
Et j'entends l'âme de ma mie
Tressaillir dans le bois rêveur.

Nuit d'étoiles … *

Je revois à notre fontaine
tes regards bleus comme les cieux;
Cette rose, c'est ton haleine,
Et ces étoiles sont tes yeux.

Nuit d'étoiles … *

Gounod – le soir
Le soir ramène le silence.
Assis sur ces rochers déserts,
Je suis dans le vague des airs
Le char de la nuit qui s'avance.

Vénus se lève à l'horizon;
A mes pieds l'étoile amoureuse
De sa lueur mystérieuse
Blanchit les tapis de gazon.

Tout à coup, détaché des cieux,
Un rayon de l'astre nocturne,
Glissant sur mon front taciturne
Vient mollement toucher mes yeux.

Doux reflet d'un globe de flamme,
Charmant rayon, que me veux-tu?
Viens-tu dans mon sein abattu
Porter la lumière à mon âme?

Descends-tu pour me révéler
Des mondes le divin mystère?
Ces secrets cachés dans la sphère
Où le jour va te rappeler?

Viens-tu dévoiler l'avenir
Au coeur fatigué qui t'implore,
Rayon divin, es-tu l'aurore
Du jour qui ne doit pas finir?

Weill - Youkali
C'est presque au bout du monde
Ma barque vagabonde
Errante au gré de l'onde
M'y conduisit un jour
L'île est toute petite
Mais la fée qui l'habite
Gentiment nous invite
À en faire le tour

*Youkali, c'est le pays de nos désirs
Youkali, c'est le bonheur, c'est le plaisir

Debussy – Night of stars
Night of stars, beneath your veils,
Beneath your breeze and fragrance,
Sad lyre that sighs,
I dream of bygone loves.

Serene melancholy
Now blooms deep in my heart,
And I hear the soul of my love
Quiver in the dreaming woods.

Night of stars...

Once more at our fountain I see
Your eyes as blue as the sky;
This rose is your breath
And these stars are your eyes.

Night of stars...

Gounod – Evening
The evening brings back silence.
Seated on these lonely rocks
I am in the cradle of the breezes
The chariot of the coming night.

Venus rises on the horizon;
At my feet the star of love
With her mysterious light
Turns the lawn's carpet white.

Suddenly, from the heavens,
A ray from the evening star
Glides upon my solemn face
Softly touches my eyes.

Gentle reflection of a globe of flame,
Charming ray, what do you want?
Have you come to my despondent heart
To bring light to my soul?

Have you come down to reveal to me
The worlds of divine mystery?
These secrets hidden in the sphere
Where day goes to call you forth?

Have you come to unveil the future
To a weary heart which implores you?
Divine ray, are you the dawn
of the day which will not end?

Weill - Youkali
It's almost at the end of the world
My vagabond boat
Drifting at the whim of the waves
Brought me there one day
The island is tiny
But the Fairy who lives there
Gently invites us
To go around a trip

Youkali, it is the land of our desires
Youkali, it is happiness, it is pleasure

Youkali, c'est la terre où l'on quitte tous les soucis
C'est, dans notre nuit, comme une éclaircie, l'étoile qu'on suit
C'est Youkali

Youkali, c'est le respect de tous les Vœux échangés,
Youkali, c'est le pays des beaux amours partagés,
C'est l'espérance qui est au cœur de tous les humains,
La délivrance que nous attendons tous pour demain,
Youkali, c'est le pays de nos désirs,
Youkali, c'est le bonheur, c'est le plaisir

Mais c'est un rêve, une folie,
Il n'y a pas de Youkali!
Mais c'est un rêve, une folie,
Il n'y a pas de Youkali! ^

Et la vie nous entraîne,
Lassante, quotidiene,
Mais la pauvre âme humaine,
Cherchant partout l'oubli,
A pour quitter la terre,
Su trouver le mystère
Où nos rêves se terrent
En quelque Youkali ...(goes to * til ^)

Youkali, it is the land where you quit all your troubles
It is, in our night, like a clearing, the star we follow
it's Youkali

Youkali, it is respect of all the exchanged wishes
Youkali, it is the country of the beautiful shared loves,
It is hope at the heart of all the humans,
The relief we all await for tomorrow,
Youkali, it is the land of our desires,
Youkali, it is happiness, it is pleasure

But this is a dream, a folly,
There is no Youkali!
But this is a dream, a folly,
There is no Youkali!

And life leads us,
Tedious routine,
But the poor human soul,
Seeking forgetfulness everywhere,
In order to quit earth,
resolved the mystery
Where our dreams hide
In some Youkali...

Weill – Lost in the stars

Before Lord God made the Sea and the Land
He held all the stars in the palm of his hand
And they ran through his fingers like grains of sand
And one little star fell alone

So the Lord God hunted through the white night air
For the little dark star on the wind down there
And he stated and promised
To take special care
So it wouldn't get lost again

Now a man don't mind if the stars grow dim
And the clouds blow over and darken him
So long as the Lord God 's watching over him
Keeping track how it all goes on~

But I've been walking through the night, through the day
Till my eyes get weary and my head turns grey
And sometimes it seems maybe God's gone away
Forgetting the promise that we've heard him say
And we're lost out here in the stars
Little stars and big stars
Blowing through the night
And we're lost out here in the stars
Little stars and big stars
Blowing through the night
And we're lost out here in the stars.

Hahn - L'heure exquise

La lune blanche
Luit dans les bois:
De chaque branche
Part une voix
Sous la ramée…

O bien-aimée.

L'étang reflète,
Profond miroir,
La silhouette
Du saule noir
Où le vent pleure…

Rêvons! C'est l'heure

Un vaste et tendre
Apaisement
Semble descendre
Du firmament,
Que l'astre irise…

C'est l'heure exquise.

Hahn - The wondrous hour

The white moon
Glows in the woods;
From each branch
There comes a voice
Under the arbour...

O beloved.

The reflecting pool,
A deep mirror
That silhouette
Of the black willow
Where the wind weeps...

It's the time to dream.

A vast and tender
Sense of calm
Seems to descend
From the heavens
Iridescent with stars...

It's the wondrous hour!

Our supporters

We would like to thank Ms Sharon Yeoh for joining the Friend's Circle (support of HK$2,500 or £250 or above) for this concert.

For more information

We are delighted to hear ideas and suggestions from you. You can also learn more at [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.