

**The
Classical
Singers**

presents

**SONGS
&
SONNETS
of
TRAVELLERS**
Chopin, Viardot, Liszt

WARREN LEE *piano*

YOONIE HAN *piano*

SYLVIA CHAN *soprano / piano / production*

*with guest appearances
from*

Eric Yip *cello*

Daniel Chua *storytelling*

Friday 1 July 2022, 8pm
Hong Kong City Hall Theatre

Part of the

**Give
me
my
song**

Series.

Introduction to The Classical Group and the “Give me my song” 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 Ešenovalds, 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 2022, we are launching a new “**Give me my song**” concert series; this follows our “**Reach for the stars**” series that is inspired by how musicians and artists have reacted to the discoveries in and in some cases presaged scientific developments, and an earlier series, “Hear the song in the music” that celebrates songs and song-inspired piano music.*

*This evening’s concert is the first in the “**Give me my song**” series: composers have their distinctive voices and the search for one’s own voice is part of a person’s journey towards finding his or her place in and making a positive impact on the world, whether you are a musician, a medical researcher, an entrepreneur, a designer, an engineer, a teacher, or a homemaker. We are delighted to be starting this series with tonight’s concert, “**Songs and sonnets of travellers: Chopin, Viardot, Liszt**”, which brings together some of the most sublime and personal music of three composers of the 19th century who travelled, explored and collaborated, who made their homes in different places and whose music were influenced by their travels, whether it is their reflections on new places or a longing for their homeland. We also celebrate the 200th anniversary of Pauline Viardot, the singer-composer, as well as her friendships with Chopin and Liszt, two of the most beloved and songful pianist-composers of their times and our times.*

 brought
together
by
beautiful
music 

“Songs and sonnets of travelers: Chopin, Viardot, Liszt” concert programme

The nightsong, the stars and me

- Liszt *Der du von dem Himmel bist* (“You who come from heaven”) (1842)
- Viardot *Die Sterne* (“The stars”) (1864)
“To stars and trailblazers!” (dedication from Dr Allan and Mrs Charmaine Zeman)

Journeying: dreams, beauty

- Liszt *Vallée d’Obermann* (1842) from Book 1 “Suisse” of *Années de pèlerinage*
- Liszt *Oh quand je dors* (“Ah, while I sleep”) (1842 / 1849)

Inspiration from new lands

- Viardot *Fleur desséchée* (“The withered flower”) (1866)
- Saint-Saëns *Mon coeur s’ouvre à ta voix* (“Softly awakes my heart”) – from *Samson et Dalila* (1876)
- Chopin *Barcarolle, Op.60 in F sharp major* (1845)
“To friendship, travels, and musical gatherings!” (dedication from Vincent and Carrie Leung)

[there will be a 15-minute intermission]

Longing, remembrance, reflections

- Chopin/Liszt *Six Polish songs – no. 2 and no. 3* (1860)
- Liszt *Ave Maria “bells of Rome”, S.182* (1862)

Friendships

- Chopin *Largo - 3rd movt from Cello Sonata* (1846)
[a short introduction: readings of letters between Viardot and Liszt and between Viardot and Chopin / Sand]
- Fauré *Après un rêve* (“Deep in a dream”) (1878)
“More than affection - seeing the same truth, sharing, and going somewhere together” - To c-z from y-z (dedication from Sharon Yeoh)
- Chopin *Etudes, Op.10, no. 3 and no. 11* (1833)
(for no 3 “Tristesse”) “This song is dedicated to all those who are in despair, lonely, or may have lost loved ones in the past years of COVID. Time heals after the teardrops fall.” (dedication from John Tang)

Give me my song

- Chopin *Ballade no 4, Op.52 in F minor* (1842)



Warren Lee - piano (*Liszt Années, Chopin Barcarolle*), songs (Liszt, Viardot, Fauré)

Hailed by The Straits Times as a musician with “a wonderful sense of colour and impeccably controlled articulation” and lauded by critics of his recital-presentation at Carnegie Hall in celebration of Leonard Bernstein’s Centennial as “ingenious” and “compelling”, Warren Lee’s artistry has brought him to five continents, gracing stages of all sizes and forms and in collaboration with international artists and leading orchestras in Asia and beyond.

Warren made his televised début with the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra at the age of six and was the first-prize winner at the 1995 Stravinsky Awards International Piano Competition and Grand Prix Ivo Pogorelich. A Steinway Artist since 2009, Warren’s discography includes 10 acclaimed solo and chamber music albums on Naxos. His recent recording of Beethoven’s transcription of his own ballet, *The Creatures of Prometheus*, was warmly received by The BBC Music Magazine (“enjoyable enough under the capable hands of Warren Lee”), while his most recent Rubinstein recording was called “stunning and imaginative” and voted deezer’s Classical Album of the week. The American Record Guide calls him a “first-rate artist” on his recording of piano music by Tan Dun and Bernstein.

Off stage, Warren is an educator and an award-winning and versatile composer with over a hundred works in print and his choral works gaining an international reputation. Warren received an Associateship from the Royal Academy of Music in 2015 and the Ian Mininberg Distinguished Alumni Award by the Yale School of Music in 2017.



Yoonie Han - piano (*Chopin Etudes, Chopin-Liszt*), songs (Viardot, Saint-Saëns), chamber

Praised for her “flowing tones, poetic phrasing and heavenly singing melodies” (Cincinnati Inquirer), and “musical imagination and feel for complex textures that drew vivid images” (Washington Post), South Korean pianist Yoonie Han has won top prizes in distinguished international competitions and the highest accolades for her elegant performances in major concert halls around the world.

Yoonie is the first-prize winner at the Washington International Piano Competition, Fulbright Concerto Competition, World Piano Competition, Kosciuszko Chopin Competition, Juilliard’s Gina Bachauer Piano Competition, Juilliard’s Chopin Piano Competition, as well as a major prize-winner at the Helsinki Maj Lind International Piano Competition, Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli Prize, Concorso Pianistico Ettore Pozzoli Internazionali, amongst others. In 2009, she was honored with the

Gawon Music Award as the “most brilliant pianist aged 17 to 31 of any nationality who possesses the most promising potential for global prominence.”

Having made her solo debut with the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra at Seoul Arts Center at age 13, Yoonie has since performed with the Berliner Symphoniker, Buffalo Philharmonic, Helsinki Philharmonic, Houston Symphony Orchestra, Banff Festival Orchestra, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Juilliard Symphony Orchestra, amongst many others. A graceful, sensitive, and powerful recitalist, and a Steinway Artist, Yoonie has performed at celebrated venues including the Berlin Philharmonie, Concertgebouw, Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, Kennedy Center, Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Frick Collection, Tanglewood Festival, Salle Cortot, Sejong Performing Arts Center, and has a special relationship with Steinway, with three albums with Steinway Records. The first of these, ‘Love and Longing’ (2014) was “Album of the week” on WQXR and made the Top 21 on the Billboard Classical Chart. The second album, ‘Goyescas’ (2017) was released to mark the 150th anniversary of the birth of the composer, Enrique Granados. The third album and most recent (2019) presents the complete *Le Rossignol Éperdu* by Reynaldo Hahn.



Sylvia Chan - soprano, piano (*Liszt Ave Maria, Chopin Ballade*), production

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, City Hall Concert Hall, Hong Kong, and recorded as a soloist (Bach, Brahms and Liszt).

Having 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 *Lieder, mélodies* and English art songs 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; she reprises some Chopin and Liszt in tonight’s concert. 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 (3rd forthcoming) 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.

Eric Yip – cello

Born and raised in Hong Kong, Eric Yip studied at the Academy of Performing Arts before going on to Chicago College of Performing Arts on a Jockey Club Scholarship and studying there under John

Sharp and Richard Hirschl. Currently a member of the Hong Kong Sinfonietta, Eric was cellist with the Civic Orchestra of Chicago and has also played at the International Menuhin Music Academy, the Asian Youth Orchestra, the Canton International Summer Music Academy, the Kirishima Music Festival, amongst others, and has performed as a soloist with a number of orchestras in Asia.

Eric is very active as a chamber musician, being the founding cellist of Hong Kong's very own Romer String Quartet, one of the most accomplished and active string quartets in Hong Kong which has also toured internationally including performances at Carnegie Hall, Shanghai Concert Hall and various other venues in China, Malaysia and US and is currently artist in residence at Premiere Performances as well as teaching in the Junior Department of the HK Academy of Performing Arts.

Daniel Chua – storytelling

Daniel KL Chua earned his PhD in musicology from Cambridge University and is currently Professor and Chair of music at the University of Hong Kong. Before joining HKU, he was the Director of Studies at St John's College, Cambridge, and later Professor of Music Theory and Analysis at King's College London. He has been a Visiting Senior Research fellow at Yale, a Henry Fellow at Harvard, and a Research Fellow at Cambridge, and recipient of the 2004 Royal Musical Association's Dent Medal.

Daniel has written widely on music, from Monteverdi to Stravinsky, but is particularly known for his work on (i) Beethoven, (ii) the intersection between music, philosophy and theology, and (iii) the history of 'absolute music'. His publications include *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge, 1999), *Beethoven and Freedom*, (Oxford, 2017), and 'Beethoven's Other Humanism' (2009), amongst others. He is currently working on a book with Yale University Press on the topic of music and joy.

*thank
you*

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*Brought together by
beautiful songs and song-
inspired piano music*

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We would like to thank the song adoptors whose dedications appear in the Programme page.

We would like to thank Mr Jimmy F.S. Chan for his invaluable advice and encouragement.

Introduction to the concert programme

Chopin, Viardot and Liszt are three composers of the 19th century who travelled, explored and collaborated, who made their homes in different places and whose music were influenced by their travels, whether it is their reflections on new places or a longing for their homeland.

Of the three, Pauline Viardot is today much less well-known than Chopin and Liszt, but she was during her time a well-known singing sensation and admired by many, and was friends with many in Europe's literary and musical circles, hosting music salons in the various places she made her home, notably in Paris, London, and Baden Baden, and later on composed over 100 songs (in a number of languages) in addition to other musical works. She had a decades-long personal, professional and collaborative friendship with Liszt and was often found in the house of George Sand playing the piano with Chopin who also accompanied her at some of her concerts. Her friends included Robert and Clara Schumann, Saint-Saëns, Brahms, Fauré, all of whom dedicated works to her or wrote for her, and she is known to have helped with the careers of Massenet and Gounod, amongst others.

Chopin had a lifelong fascination with the song (and devotion to Bellini) and the voice was the model he used as he developed a distinctive style of pianistic lyricism, but we only know of 19 songs he wrote, collected into and published posthumously as Opus.74. Written over 20 years until two years before his death and set on the text of original poems by his Polish contemporaries Mickiewicz, Zaleski, Pol, Witwicki and Krasiński, only two of the songs were published during Chopin's lifetime, though they were played by Chopin himself in some of his concerts, and six of the songs were later transcribed for the piano by Liszt, his friend and "rival" in the Parisian musical circles, with whom he performed together in salons, to whom he dedicated the entire set of his Op.10 Etudes, and who admired his compositions. In fact, the piano transcriptions have become more famous than Chopin's original.

While Chopin famously drew on his Polish roots in his songs as well as in his well-known piano works that became genres of their own, whether it is mazurkas, polonaises, waltzes, or ballades, Liszt's music was shaped less by a longing for his homeland but more by the breadth of his artistic interest as he travelled: a major work for the piano is a series of pieces collected in his 3 books of *Années de pèlerinage* ("years of pilgrimage"), with many of the pieces drawing on English, French, German and Italian poetry, inspired by the landscape he saw and the impressions and emotions they created (Book 1 is "Switzerland" and Book 2 "Italy"), or stirred by specific sights or works of art. Liszt also wrote some of the finest songs, set on some of the most beautiful poetry of Hugo, Goethe, Heine and others, characterized by an intense intimacy between words and music; the breadth of this part of Liszt's works, encompassing settings in 5 languages and consisting of around 80 songs (and 160 if including alternative versions), also reflects the cosmopolitan nature of the composer's life, with his German songs representing over half of the output and considered to be the connecting link between the songs of Schubert and Schumann and those of the later German composers like Richard Strauss and Hugo Wolf, even if Liszt as a song composer is a somewhat neglected aspect of his reputation.

Viardot's life and works, for her part, were also very much shaped by her travels and outlook: with Spanish roots and France her adopted home, Pauline famously had another adopted home in Russia, especially St Petersburg where she was one of the first to perform Italian opera in its original language and where she not only returned for a number of subsequent seasons and performed in

recitals too, but also established friendships with a significant number of musical and literary heavyweights. While she wrote over 100 songs, set on Russian, French, German as well as English poetry, we note the “Russian songs” that include 16 set on Pushkin’s poetry, making her one of the most prolific writers of songs on Pushkin poems. This also reflects her close 40-year long friendship with Ivan Turgenev, under whose influence she set the poetry of some of Russia’s greats to music.

This concert (rescheduled from the original date of 21 February due to Covid) celebrates the connections between the composers and brings together Chopin’s not-so-known Polish songs that are delightful gems and his only compositions for the voice (an instrument he loved most dearly), as well as the songs of Viardot and Liszt that reflect their knowledge of and the depth of sensibilities across different languages, including the former’s songs that were written on Russian poetry (Pushkin especially, whom Turgenev adored), and the piano works of Liszt that reflect his many journeys and travels (or as he himself called it, “pilgrimages”) as well as two of Chopin’s most accomplished piano works of his “late” period that can also be seen as his “[swan]song”, one a bundle of sophisticated harmonies and mesmerizing modulations, anchored in F sharp major, and the other in F minor that has been called “the most exalted, intense and sublimely powerful of all Chopin’s compositions”.

Notes on the music

F. LISZT

Der du von dem Himmel bist (S.279/1) (1842)

Liszt’s song is based on the first of Goethe’s two settings of *Wandrer’s Nachtlied* (the wanderer’s nightsong) that was written in 1776. The poem is a plea to be done with Faustian striving and find peace, with a linguistic solecism whereby “pain” and “joy” are bound together by a masculine article, despite the feminine gender of the second noun, affirming that pleasure and pain are opposite poles of the same thing – the human condition perhaps? We include this as our first song for this concert because of the universality in its first line “You who come from heaven” and its reference to a struggle with pleasure and pain. Liszt created four musical settings of this poem between 1842 and 1870 (the fourth version is incomplete); we are performing the first version which is typical of Liszt’s song versioning in that the first is often the longest and with the most pianistic flourishes, beginning with a brooding introduction in the piano before the singer enters with a quiet prayer. Thereafter, the music alternates between invocations of “sweet peace” and convulsions of anguish (“I am weary of this restlessness”, “what use is this pain and joy”) in which the singer repeats the text of this brief poem over and over. The urgency of this plea cannot be doubted.

The short Goethe poem is one of his most famous and is supposed to have been written under the tree later called the Goethe Oak. The text has of course been set by many others, including notably Schubert, who set both of Goethe’s wanderer’s nightsongs, known as *Wandrer’s Nachtlied I* (D.224) and *Wandrer’s Nachtlied II* (D.768) as Liszt also did (the second wanderer’s nightsong being his S.306, *Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh*).

P. VIARDOT

Die Sterne (1862-3)

“The stars” is rightly considered one of Pauline Viardot’s most beautiful songs, with a first-rate text from none other than Afanasi Fet, one of Russia’s greatest lyric poets, and the composer evoking rapt stargazing, the music calling upwards towards the heavens. The lyrical and interweaving cello part adds a layer of gorgeous expressiveness.

Viardot employs simple word-painting here: when the text refers to the twinkling light of the stars, the piano lines are given tremolo patterns, and the vocal line tends to rise when references to stars are made.

F. LISZT

Vallée d'Obermann, from *Années de Pèlerinage*, Book I, Suisse (1842)

Liszt was the quintessential cosmopolitan. One of his biographers summed it up nicely that “*There was hardly a country in Europe to which his journeys did not extend. We find him in Seville, in Lisbon, in Copenhagen, all over Poland and Russia, in Hungary, and at Constantinople. The scope of his voyages was without precedent in the history of music.*” Liszt collected musical images as he traveled and his most famous “tonal snapshots” are the three volumes of *Années de pèlerinage* (Years of Pilgrimage) that he wrote for the piano.

Vallée d'Obermann is from his first book of *Années* and the most substantive piece in the collection; it was originally composed in 1835-6, first published in 1842 and later included in a revised version, in the first book of *Années* that was published in 1855 and contains musical souvenirs of his travels in Switzerland in the 1830s. Overtly literary in conception, *Vallée d'Obermann* pays tribute to a young literary hero who was melancholic, cynical and solitary, qualities that Liszt sought to capture in this tone poem for the piano, with its principal theme being a descending scale figure that goes through numerous harmonic and chromatic transformations that parallel the hero's emotional turmoil, and which he prefaced with two quotations from the novel: “*What do I wish? What am I? What shall I ask of nature? I feel; I exist only to waste myself in unconquerable longings...*”.

F. LISZT

Oh ! quand je dors (S.282) (1842 / 1849)

Liszt's engagement with the song repertoire was intense and long-lasting, despite his name so firmly associated with 19th-century virtuoso pianism. Over a span of 40 years he wrote more than 80 songs in German, French, Italian, Hungarian, Russian, and even English.

In *Oh! quand je dors* (Oh! while I sleep), this most cosmopolitan of composers in fact wrote one of the loveliest settings of a poem by the French great, Victor Hugo, with his other Victor Hugo songs dating also from the same period, the years between 1842 and 1844, a time when Liszt the piano virtuoso was busy whizzing across Europe.

Tender and passionate, *Oh! quand je dors* is Hugo's reference to the Italian poet Petrarch and the latter's love sonnets for the unattainable yet captivating woman known only as “Laura.” Liszt knows Italian literature very well and had already penned three Petrarch Sonnets (in Italian) when he composed this French *mélodie*. The light texture, lyrical floating melody, and the rising and falling arpeggios of the piano line characterize the ethereal and mysterious nature of the woman whom Petrarch desired. The song was subject to only one revision (rare by Liszt's standards!) and therefore exists in two versions – the first version composed in 1842, during one of his concert tours, and the revised version dating from 1849, reworked to begin with an unusual harmony and to also include a vocal cadenza between the second and third stanzas. It is this later version, sung today, that became his best known French song.

F. CHOPIN

Barcarolle Op.60 in F sharp major (1845)

Chopin had never been to Venice, so his evocation of the song of the gondoliers derives not from the

recall of a musical memory, but rather from an imaginative journey into moonlight on waters. Half dreamy nocturne, half heart-wringing love cry, it alternates between poetic reflection and restless passionate outburst. This 8-minute long piece seems to encapsulate in a single work the full range of *Chopinesque* musical sensibility; it is perhaps no wonder the composer played it frequently in his concerts in Paris, London and in his last public concert, in Scotland.

The standard characteristics of the piano barcarolle, as announced by Mendelssohn are all there: the 12/8 meter and repetitive rocking-boat rhythm stabilized by pedal points in the bass, and a love-duet texture of double 3rds and 6ths. When Chopin wrote this, his only Barcarolle, artistic appropriations of this popular genre (effectively a gondolier's song) were to be found mainly in opera, but there were also examples in *Lieder* (as, for example, in Schubert's *Auf dem Wasser zu singen*), and some in post-classical traditions of popular pianism (including some of Mendelssohn's Songs Without Words, such as the *Gondellied* in A major), but this composition with its sophisticated harmonies and lengthy chromatic modulations surpasses all these and was quite unlike any other in piano music at the time. It remains one of the towering masterpieces of Chopin's final years.

P. VIARDOT

Fleur desséchée (1866)

This is one of the most marvelous of melodies Pauline Viardot set to the beautiful words of the Russian great, Alexander Pushkin, in French poet-and-friend Louis Pomey's brilliant translation of the poem; it is the first song included in a collection of Viardot's 12 song compositions set on Russian poetry but published in German (1864) and French (1866) translations, with the help of both Ivan Turgenev and Anton Rubinstein.

An old, dried flower in a book brings curiosity and wonder to the finder. *Where did it come from? When? Who plucked this flower?* The melody is luscious and one could almost feel the fragrance of the dried flower and the memories it leads us to as the text flows on.

Pauline's Russian connections span from performing with great success in St Petersburg's operatic seasons in the early 1830s, befriending Turgenev and a number of important figures in Russia's artistic and cultural circles, including introduction to the literature of Pushkin and Fet, both of whose poems she set to songs, continuing to perform and champion pieces by Russian composers (including songs by Dargomyzhsky, Glinka, Rimsky-Korsakov, Tchaikovsky and Rubenstein) in her concerts across Europe and in her salon long after her retirement from the stage, and being often one of the first non-Russians to know of new Russian works, e.g. Mussorgsky's opera, *Boris Godunov*, which she thought highly of.

C. SAINT-SAËNS

Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix (from *Samson et Dalila*) (1876)

Camille Saint-Saëns is best known for his dazzling piano pieces and colorful orchestral scores, but he also composed a large body of choral and solo vocal works, many of which remain popular concert pieces today. The only genre Saint-Saëns seemed to struggle with was that of grand opera, with one notable exception, *Samson et Dalila*, the only one of his 13 operas that is still regularly performed today.

The opera is dedicated to Pauline Viardot, a singing sensation of the time and who became a close friend of Saint-Saëns', with the latter becoming a regular at the famed Viardot music salons, often playing the organ and occasionally singing; and even if Pauline did not give the premiere of the full opera itself, she had encouraged Saint-Saëns during its writing and had given as a surprise a private

stage performance of the second act, at the little theatre in her garden at her home, and so it was from her lips that the beautiful melody of *Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix* was first heard, which was only fitting, seeing that Saint-Saëns actually wrote the part of *Dalila* for the great singer herself.

While Saint-Saëns began work on *Samson et Dalila* in 1867, he received significant objections and lack of interest partly due to its being an opera based on a Biblical story; it was not until Franz Liszt, who admired Saint-Saëns's work, offered to produce the opera that Saint-Saëns was able to seriously devote himself to its composition. It was completed in 1876 and premiered in Weimar in 1877, where it proved an immediate success.

Delilah sings her famous and romantic aria in Act 2, *Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix*, as a response to Samson's declaration of love for her and as she attempts to seduce Samson into revealing the secret of his strength; the opera itself is based on the Biblical story of Samson, a Hebrew leader whose love for the deceitful seductress Delilah brings about his own destruction. It is interesting to note that this aria in Act 2 was practically the first number of this work that Saint-Saëns put on paper; it remains a landmark of French opera.

F. CHOPIN / F. LISZT

Six Polish songs S.480, no.2, Wiosna ("Spring") & no.3, Pierscien ("The Ring") (1860)

Although we know that Chopin improvised songs to Polish texts throughout his life, and that he wrote a good many of them down, only 19 have survived. Written at various times, from 1829 (prior to his departure from Poland) to 1847 (two years before his death), 17 were published posthumously by his friend Julian Fontana as Op. 74 in 1857, while two others gathered dust for more than half a century before their publication in 1910. They quickly became very popular and widely translated; Franz Liszt, for one, quickly arranged six for piano as *Chants polonaise*.

Chopin's songs brought to the European Romantic song repertoire a character, a tone it had lacked before: folkloric inspiration, a youthful tenderness, a boisterous aplomb, a nostalgic reflection, and finally a deep patriotic feeling.

These songs resist easy categorization. Of the great Romantic song composers, only Schubert was born before Chopin, and his *Lieder* were entirely unknown in Warsaw. Generally strophic in style, many of Chopin's songs are dance-songs, usually of distinctly national character, all set to Polish words, and some of intensely patriotic colour.

"He sang at the piano, or rather declaimed while accompanying himself, and composed them as he went along", wrote Julian Fontana, who attended the many poetic and musical soirées that saw the birth of Chopin's songs. Between 1847 and 1860, Franz Liszt arranged six of the Op. 74 songs as piano transcriptions under the title *Six Chants polonaise* ("Six Polish songs"), S.480, published in Paris in 1860; these have become quite popular and two of the six (the first two numbers in Liszt's collection) are performed at this evening's concert.

Wiosna "Spring" (1838)

This is one of the lighter songs, evoking a bucolic landscape and set on a text by Chopin's friend Stefan Witwicki, with the constant oscillation between the minor and the major (G minor/B flat major) creating a mood of anticipation. The rather sentimental text refers literally to singing and a lark responding ... :

*"Graze and wander, my little herd,
I sit by a rock,
A sweet song that I like
I'll sing for myself ...*

*The tear escapes my eye,
Within me sings a stream,
To me from above,
A skylark responds."*

Pierscien "The Ring" (1836)

This song is based on yet another of Witwicki's poem, the main poet for the Op.74 songs and to whom Chopin also dedicated his Op. 41 Mazurkas, with Liszt creating drama out of the mazurka rhythm. Here's an excerpt of the text:

<i>When your nursemaids sang you sad lullabies, I was already in love with you, ... Other boys ran after girls; I loved faithfully.</i>	<i>You became another man's wife; I still loved you. ... In vain I was faithful and constant, In vain I gave you that ring."</i>
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F. LISZT

Ave Maria "Die Glocken von Rom" ("Bells of Rome"), S.182 (1862)

Liszt is one of the few composers to take on the *Ave Maria* multiple times; this version that is often referred to as "Bells of Rome" is in E major and is not connected with a vocal work, and, although the rhythm fits the opening of the text the ecclesiastical connection remains general.

The subtitle "Bells of Rome" may not be Liszt's, but the bell effects are specifically indicated. Liszt was in Rome in the 1860s following the death of two of his children and retreating to a monastery outside Rome in late 1862. The piece starts simply but by the end of the work, the pianist is working hard and virtuosically at both ends of the keyboard! In this five-minute piece, we see and hear the Liszt who is carrying both his own religious thoughts and his virtuosity into his music.

F. CHOPIN

Cello sonata in G minor, op.65 (1846)

Chopin's much-loved cello sonata is his last published work, written for his friend, the Parisian cellist Auguste Franchomme, and premiered by the two friends on 16 February 1848 at Chopin's last public appearance.

Only five chamber works by Chopin exist; three of them are for cello and piano. In poor health and the midst of an anguished breakup with George Sand, Chopin found it within himself to work extensively on this work, writing that "...with my cello sonata I am now contented, now discontented." The result is a grand sonata equal in scale to Chopin's most serious and significant works. A big, virtuosic cello part is counterbalanced by masterful piano writing in which Chopin never compromises his unique style.

The gorgeous *Largo*, the sonata's third movement, is only 27 bars long, but it is the heart of the work. Words fail to describe it; one has to listen to this gem of a work to appreciate its sublime and supreme beauty, music that touches the listener deeply and intensely while also exploiting the full colour of the cello.

G. FAURE

Après un rêve (Op.7, no. 1) (1878)

Gabriel Fauré, one of the most important composers of the French art song (or *mélodies*) tradition, was introduced into the Viardot household by none other than his teacher Camille Saint-Saëns and he quickly became a *habitué* of the Viardot music salons on Thursdays and was even briefly engaged to one of Pauline's daughters.

The lyrical, languid, and richly expressive melodic line of *Après un Rêve*, one of Fauré's early songs and probably his most famous, is set to words by Romain Bussine and with a piano part consisting of simple but evocative chords. The text – a French adaptation of an Italian poem – describes a dream of a lover's romantic rendezvous of an almost otherworldly kind, away from darkness, and toward an awakening light. The dreamer, who longs to return to the mysterious night, reaches the realization that the dream cannot return.

The leading *Lieder* pianist Graham Johnson suggests that the inspiration for this most popular song, as for his other song with Italianate influence, *Sérénade toscane*, probably came from Pauline Viardot's settings of Tuscan folk poetry.

F. CHOPIN

Etudes Op.10, no. 3 and no. 11 (1833)

Chopin's *Etudes* ("studies") probably best exemplifies the style he created in which the piano was the medium for song and for a whole new world of sonority.

He wrote 25 *études*, mostly collected in Op.10 and 25, with each presenting a specific technical challenge to the pianist but in a way that transcends its original pedagogical purpose, each study becoming an exquisite "character piece". Op.10 is the first set and consisted of 12 *études* published in 1833, dedicated to Franz Liszt: "to my friend, Franz Liszt", he wrote, with Liszt being one-and-a-half years his junior and who would later compose his own *Transcendental Études*. The two were friends, collaborators as well as rivals in the Parisian salons, though Liszt was genuinely flattered about the dedication and performed these pieces frequently in his recitals.

In Chopin's *études*, Robert Schumann wrote admiringly, "imagination and technique share dominion side by side." Each is a work of art in itself, carefully balancing creativity with a didactic purpose. Largely self-taught as a pianist, Chopin's mind was full of ideas for the development of piano technique and he was able to imaginatively translate the technical means of playing into poetic flights of composition. He took a first draft of the *études* with him to Paris where, as a 21-year-old, he decided to settle, and Op. 10 was published a few years later.

As a pianist, Chopin played his *études* in concert, and not as cycles but in selections; Schumann, who was born in the same year as Chopin, had commented on this: "I have had the advantage of hearing most of the *Etudes* played by Chopin himself, and quite à la Chopin did he play them!"

No. 3, in E major, one of the most lyrical in the set and remains one of his best-loved pieces, has what the composer himself called "such beautiful melody" (*chant*) and is considered an expression of his nostalgia for his homeland, while no 11 is known for its extended arpeggiated chords, enharmonic shifts and is somewhat Lisztian in style.

A. CHOPIN

Ballade no 4, Op.52 in F minor (1842)

The ballade was one of the favorite idioms of nineteenth-century Romantic poetry, and an ideal medium for story-telling. Chopin is generally credited with the invention of the ballade as a musical form, and his Ballades inspired Liszt, Brahms, Grieg and others to explore this form and compose ballades of their own. Chopin's Ballades can be seen as stories inspired by other stories.

Chopin's four Ballades are among the finest, most original, and enduring works that capture the essence of the Romantic aesthetic and they all belong to his "mature" period, 1835 to 1842. Ballade no 4 in F minor was composed in 1842 in Paris and Nohant (revised in 1843); it was performed with

great success at his public concert with Pauline Viardot at the *Salle Pleyel* in Paris on February 21, 1842. The British pianist John Ogdon has called it “*the most exalted, intense and sublimely powerful of all Chopin’s compositions*”, while Austrian pianist Paul Badura-Skoda spoke of the music’s “*real explosive power*”. Together with his Barcarolle, played earlier in tonight’s concert, as well as the Polonaise-Fantaisie and the second and third sonatas, the Fourth Ballade represents the summit of Chopin’s art.

With an opening that seems to come out of nowhere (distant bells, some say) and is nowhere near F minor (until the 8th bar), the piece becomes increasingly rich in texture and polyphonically intricate as it progresses, with incredible harmonic modulations and effects, including a section in C flat major (a triton away from F minor), a canonic treatment of the first subject almost as a homage to Bach (there is much more counterpoint there than in the previous 3 Ballades), and a masterful build-up (with 5 slow *pianissimo* chords following three chords played *fff*) to the coda that is fiery and intricate, reminding us of Chopin’s capacity for large-scale architectures (that allow for dramas and heroics) as well as an ability to speak with the most intimacy, utmost tenderness and as if in confidence. It ends resolutely, and with inevitability, in F minor.

Text to songs (with English translations)

Liszt - Der du von dem Himmel bist

Der du von dem Himmel bist,
Alles Leid und Schmerzen stillest,
Den, der doppelt elend ist,
Doppelt mit Erquickung füllest,
Ach, ich bin des Treibens müde!
Was soll all der Schmerz und Lust?
Süsser Friede!
Komm, ach komm in meine Brust!

Liszt - You who come from heaven

You who come from heaven,
Soothing all pain and sorrow,
Filling the doubly wretched
Doubly with delight,
Ah, I am weary of this restlessness!
What use is all this pain and joy?
Sweet peace!
Come, ah come into my breast!

Viardot - Die Sterne

Ich starrte und stand unbeweglich,
den Blick zu den Sternen gewandt,
und da zwischen mir und den Sternen
sich wob ein vertrauliches Band.

Viardot - The stars

I stood a long time motionless,
Peering at the distant stars, -
Between those stars and me
The unwitting connection was born.

Ich dachte... weiss nicht was ich dachte...
Fern klang’s wie ein seliger Chor,
leis bebten die goldenen Sterne,
nun lieb’ ich sie mehr als zu vor!

I thought... I do not remember what I was thinking;
I listened to the mysterious choir,
The stars were trembling gently,
And since then I love them...

Liszt - Oh! quand je dors

Oh! quand je dors, viens auprès de ma couche,
Comme à Pétrarque apparaissait Laura,
Et qu’en passant ton haleine me touche ...
Soudain ma bouche
S’entr’ouvrira!
Sur mon front morne où peut-être s’achève
Un songe noir qui trop longtemps dura,
Que ton regard comme un astre se lève ...
Et soudain mon rêve
Rayonnera!
Puis sur ma lèvre où voltige une flamme,
Éclair d’amour que Dieu même épura,
Pose un baiser, et d’ange deviens femme ...
Soudain mon âme
S’éveillera!

Liszt - Ah, while I sleep

Ah, while I sleep, come close to where I lie,
As Laura once appeared to Petrarch,
And let your breath in passing touch me ...
At once my lips
Will part!
On my sombre brow, where a dismal dream
That lasted too long now perhaps is ending,
Let your countenance rise like a star ...
At once my dream
Will shine!
Then on my lips, where a flame flickers –
A flash of love which God himself has purified –
Place a kiss and be transformed from angel into woman ...
At once my soul
Will wake!

Viardot - Fleur desséchée

Dans ce vieux livre l’on t’oublie,
Fleur sans parfum et sans couleur,
Mais une étrange rêverie,
Quand je te vois, emplit mon coeur.

Viardot - A withered flower

A flower, dried up and withered,
I find, forgotten within a book,
And suddenly with curious thoughts
My mind begins to fill.

Quel jour, quel lieu te virent naître?
Quel fut ton sort? qui t'arracha?
Qui sait? Je les connus peut-être,
Ceux dont l'amour te conserva!

Rappelais-tu, rose flétrie,
La première heure ou les adieux?
Les entretiens dans la prairie
Ou dans le bois silencieux?

Vit-il encor? existe-t-elle?
À quels rameaux flottent leurs nids!
Ou comme toi, qui fus si belle,
Leurs fronts charmants sont-ils flétris?

Saint-Saëns - Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix

Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix,
comme s'ouvrent les fleurs
aux baisers de l'aurore !
Mais, ô mon bienaimé,
pour mieux sécher mes pleurs,
que ta voix parle encore !
Dis-moi qu'à Dalila
tu reviens pour jamais.
Redis à ma tendresse
les serments d'autrefois,
ces serments que j'aimais !
Ah! réponds à ma tendresse !
Verse-moi, verse-moi l'ivresse !

Ainsi qu'on voit des blés
les épis onduler
sous la brise légère,
ainsi frémit mon cœur,
prêt à se consoler,
à ta voix qui m'est chère !
La flèche est moins rapide
à porter le trépas,
que ne l'est ton amante
à voler dans tes bras !
Ah! réponds à ma tendresse !
Verse-moi, verse-moi l'ivresse !

Fauré - Après un Rêve

Dans un sommeil que charmait ton image
Je rêvais le bonheur, ardent mirage,
Tes yeux étaient plus doux, ta voix pure et sonore,
Tu rayonnais comme un ciel éclairé par l'aurore;

Tu m'appelais et je quittais la terre
Pour m'enfuir avec toi vers la lumière,
Les cieux pour nous entr'ouvraient leurs nues,
Splendeurs inconnues, lueurs divines entrevues,

Hélas! Hélas! triste réveil des songes
Je t'appelle, ô nuit, rends moi tes mensonges,
Reviens, reviens radieuse,
Reviens ô nuit mystérieuse!

Where did it blossom? When? In which spring?
Did it flower for a long time, and who plucked it?
A strange or a familiar hand?
And why was it put here?

Was it a souvenir of a tender meeting,
Or of a cruel parting,
Or of solitary wandering
In the quiet fields, or the shadow of the forest?

And lives yet "he", or "she"?
And where is their abode now?
Or have they withered already
Like this mysterious flower?

Saint-Saëns - Softly awakes my heart

My heart opens to your voice
Like the flowers open
To the kisses of dawn!
But, oh my beloved,
To better dry my tears,
Let your voice speak again!
Tell me that you are returning
To Delilah forever!
Repeat to my tenderness
The promises of old times,
Those promises that I loved!
Ah! Respond to my tenderness!
Fill me with ecstasy!

As one sees the blades
Of wheat that wave
In the light wind,
So trembles my heart,
Ready to be consoled,
By your voice that is dear to me!
The arrow is less rapid
In bringing death,
Than is your lover
To fly into your arms!
Ah! Respond to my tenderness!
Fill me with ecstasy!

Fauré - Deep in a dream

In a sleep charmed by your image,
I dreamed of happiness, burning mirage.
Your eyes were milder, your voice pure and ringing,
You shone like a sky lit by the aurora;

You called to me and I left the earth
To flee with you toward the light.
The heavens opened their clouds for us,
Unknown splendors, divine glimmers met us,

Alas! Alas! Sad awakening from dreams...
I demand of you, night, give back to me your lies,
Return, return in radiance,
Return, mysterious night!

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