

Music for a Midsummer's Eve



The Rheindahlen Choral Society

Musical Director

Helen Ross

Ray Ross

Pianists

Frank Gillett

Front of House Manager

John Lebeter

Catering Arrangements

Vick Faulkner

The Skylark Woodwind Quintet

Flute

Ray Ross

Oboe

Candice Davies

Clarinet

David Clarke

French Horn

Jon Dempster

Bassoon

Helen Ross

During this evening, your appreciation may be enhanced by a few scraps of background material concerning the content of the programme. First of all, the Liebeslieder Walzer are a set of Viennese style waltz movements for two pianos and vocal quartet. The lyrics are folk poems of Hungary, Poland, and Russia translated into German and adapted by G. F. Daumer for his collection entitled Polydora. Brahms' setting of these poems was a direct response to his infatuation with Clara and Robert Schumann's daughter, Julie, a result of Brahms' long association with the Schumanns, who first recognised Brahms' talent and potential. Brahms was a secretive admirer, not revealing his feeling for Julie until it was too late, and her planned marriage to an Italian nobleman was irreversible. These "Lovesong Waltzes" expressing his regard for Julie were written in the earlier phase of Brahms' preoccupation, before he was disabused of the slight chance of a fortuitous outcome, and therefore are frivolous and even playful in mood, with musical witicisms and fanciful imaginings. Not all the poems are set in four parts, some are duets or solos, the variation in vocal colour being matched by the kaleidoscope of tempos, textures and passions reflecting the turbulent state of young love.

Elgar's "From the Bavarian Highlands" is equally a product of youthful high spirits. Elgar and his wife Alice (who adapted and translated the lyrics into English) made a series of vacation trips to Bavaria in the early 1890's, from which emerged this set of affectionate tributes to various aspects of Bavarian country life. The three we are performing include an Elgarian depiction of Bavarian dancing, a tale of love deceived, the piano accompaniment of which is in the yodelling style of Bavarian mountain music, and a more universal, but still enticingly exotic lullaby based on soothing zither strumming rather than traditional rocking. The seductive piano introduction to the Lullaby is very foreign to the British ear, and contrasts with the restfully monotonous opening vocal line, which then mutates into a dream inducing evocation of distant dancing when the rest of the choir join the altos in the middle section of the piece. Dance-like and drowsy alternate until sleep in the end triumphs.

The modern Woodwind Quintet emerged as a performing grouping in the late eighteenth century. If the strings had a repertoire of their own, without wind players, then it followed that the standard group of wind players in a classical orchestra should also have their opportunity to shine. Thus the modern assembly of five timbres represented by Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Horn and Bassoon, began to accrue a body of compositions for Wind Quintet, for such was the core wind group of the classical orchestra of Mozart, Haydn, and early Beethoven who were amongst the foremost composers of the period. Though trumpets and trombones might occasionally be drafted in for special effects or weighty drama, they were part time orchestral players at best, whereas the French Horn, with its flexibility, dexterity and tonal adaptability was from the start of the seventeenth century a full time member of the orchestra. The Quintet is a versatile, clearly spoken precision instrument, capable of subtleties of colour and range of volume unattainable by string groups. In the classical period, this was advantageous, but the early romantic composers sought greater depth and tonal homogeneity. They also took themselves far too seriously to enjoy the virtues of a woodwind group, which earlier and later composers realised had potential for wit and repartee as well as the more sombre moods. Eighteenth century composers started the Wind Quintet tradition, which was then revived in the late nineteenth century and thrives into modern times producing a vital and colourful body of work, which will reward the adventurous explorer. I hope our brief foray into this relatively unknown territory will whet a few appetites!

2. Am Gesteine rauscht die Flut

The wildly lashed waves dash against the rocks;
whoever has not learnt to sigh will learn it when he loves.

12. Schlosser auf, und mache Schlösser

Locksmith, come! Make me padlocks, padlocks without number!
So that once for all I can shut their malicious mouths.

1. Rede, Mädchen, allzu liebtes

Tell me, my sweetest girl,
who with your glances
have kindled in my cool breast
these wild and passionate feelings,

5. Die grüne Hopfenranke

The green tendrils of the vine
creep low along the ground.
How gloomy, too,
the lovely young girl looks!

6. Ein kleiner, hübscher Vogel

A pretty little bird flew off
into a garden full of fruit.
Were I a pretty little bird
I'd not hesitate, I'd do the same.

4. Wie des Abends schöne Röte

Like a lovely sunset
I, a humble girl, would glow,
and find favour with one alone,
radiating endless rapture.

7. Wohl schön bewand war es

All seemed rosy at one time
with my life, with my love!
Through a wall, through ten walls
my lover's gaze would reach me.
But now, alas,
though I stand right in front of his cool gaze,
neither his eyes nor his heart take note of me.

will you not relent,
will you, with an excess of virtue,
live without love's rapture?
Or do you wish me to come to you?

Why, green tendrils,
do you not stretch up to the sky?
Why, lovely girl,
is your heart so heavy?

How can the vine grow tall
without support?

How can the girl be joyful,
when her lover's far away?

To live without love's rapture
is a bitter fate I would not suffer.
Come, then, with your dark eyes,
come, when the stars beckon!

The bird alighted on a fair hand,
the lucky thing wanted nothing more.
Were I a pretty little bird,
I'd not hesitate, I'd do the same.

15. Nachtigall, sie singt so schön
The nightingale sings so sweetly,
when the stars are sparkling, love me, dear heart,
kiss me in the dark!

16. Ein dunkler Schacht ist Liebe

Love is a dark pit,
an all too dangerous well;
I tumbled in, alas,
can neither hear nor see,
can only recall my rapture,
and only bemoan my grief.

9. Am Donaustande

On the Danube's shore there stands a house,
from its windows a rosy girl looks out.
The girl is excellently guarded,
ten bolts are fixed to her door.
Ten bolts of iron - a mere trifle!
I'll break them down,
as though they were glass.

11. Nein, es ist nicht auszukommen

No, it is not possible
to put up with these people;
they interrupt everything so spitefully.
If I'm happy, they say I harbour lewd desires;
if I'm quiet, they say I'm madly in love.

3. O die Frauen, O die Frauen

O women, O women,
how they delight and melt the heart!
I should have long since turned
monk,
were it not for women!

14. Sieh, wie ist die Welle klar

See how clear the waves are,
when the moon shines down!
You, my dearest love, love me in return!

10. O wie sanft die Quelle sich

Ah, how gently the stream meanders through the meadow!
Ah, how sweet, when love finds itself requited!

A little bird flies through the skies, Searching for a branch;
thus does one heart seek another, where it might rest in bliss.

13. Vögelein durchrauscht die Luft

18. Es bebet das Gesträuche
The foliage trembles where a bird in flight
has brushed against it.
And so my soul trembles too,
shuddering with love, desire and pain,
whenever it thinks of you.

17. Nicht wandle, mein Licht

Do not wander, my love, out there in the fields;
the ground would be too damp for your tender feet.
All paths and tracks are flooded out there,
so abundantly have my eyes been weeping.

8. Wenn so lind dein Auge mir

When you gaze at me so tenderly and so full of love
all the gloom that assails me fades away.
Oh, do not let this love's sweet ardour vanish!
No one will love you as truly as I.