

## Welcome all.

This evening's recital might seem a rather eclectic mix of style and age at first sight. However it is somewhat a journey or perhaps a hint of a story inspired by my homeland, my past and present – I'll keep my fingers crossed that the heartache towards the end is not a precursory of what is to come!!

## My Lagan Love Arr. Hamilton-Harty

The lyrics to this traditional Irish air were written in 1903 in North Donegal by Joseph Campbell and in 1904 he collaborated with the composer Herbert Hughes. The Lagan is the river that runs through Belfast. However, some argue that the Lagan in the song refers to a stream that empties into Lough Swilly in County Donegal. It was a firm favourite in the Connor household!

## Songs before Sleep 1-6 Richard Rodney Bennett

Written for Jonathan Lemalu in 2002 these 6 texts were taken from the Oxford book of Nursery Rhymes. You will undoubtedly recognise the texts but the melodies are much different from those our mothers sang to us. Reviewing their premier, Hilary Finch of the Times Newspaper wrote 'six nursely rhymes, grave and gay – and sometimes, with their dark gashes of violence, so politically incorrect that the audience could only chuckle with embarrassed laughter' Sadly Richard Rodney Bennett passed away in December 2012 and although I never met the composer, I present them this evening in his memory.

## Tit for Tat Benjamin Britten

Britten's favourite poet during his youth was Walter de la Mare, and in 1968 the mature composer assembled a set of five of his juvenile settings of de la Mare's poetry under the title *Tit for Tat*. The premier for this cycle, of which we hear the 5<sup>th</sup> and final song, was in Aldeburgh in 1969. That evening, Britten commented that he had made his selection from songs composed between the ages of fourteen and seventeen and had now 'tidied them up'. He wrote that 'the boy's vision has a simplicity and clarity which might have given a little pleasure to the great poet, with his unique insight into a child's mind.' However fun and play are not the order of the day but Britten's infamous darkness comes to the fore.

## Papageno's 'Suicide Aria' W. A. Mozart

from Die Zauberflöte

Papageno, the Queen of the Night's Bird Catcher laments the loss of his 'girlfriend' papageno and exclaims that he doesn't see a future and might as well go and end his life. Will he or won't he?

## Notturmo (Night Piece) Benjamin Britten.

This is one of only a few Piano Solos composed by Britten. Written in 1963 as a test piece for the very first Leeds Piano Competition. It is a moody, disturbed nocturn, and seems deceptively simple. However, it's skill is in the nuances of touch and rhythm to evoke the sense of dark and foreboding.

## Danny boy Irish Traditional.

This Irish air, written by Frederic Weatherly set to the tune of 'The Londonderry Air', is surely the most famous of Irish songs. There are various theories as to the true meaning of "Danny Boy". Some listeners have interpreted the song to be a message from a parent to a son going off to war or leaving as part of the Irish diaspora. The 1918 version of the sheet music included alternative lyrics ("Eily Dear"), with the instructions that "when sung by a man, the words in italic should be used; the song then becomes "Eily Dear", so that "Danny Boy" is only to be sung by a lady". In spite of this, it is unclear whether this was Weatherly's intent.

## Interval

**15 minutes**

## **The Stuttering lovers** Irish Traditional

This light hearted ditty tells of a naughty farmyard encounter!

Arranged by Herbert Hughes.

## **Who is Silvia? / O Mistress Mine** Gerald Finzi

Taken from his Song Cycle 'Let Us Garlands Bring' These songs, which use Shakespeare's words from Two Gentlemen of Verona and Twelfth Night, deal with love and the passing of time. Finzi, who wrote the music as a birthday present for Ralph Vaughan-Williams in 1942, has created such highly attractive music to present the Bard's texts.

## **Mab! La Reine de mensonges** Charles Francois Gounod

from Romeo et Juliette Charles Gounod

Romeo and Mercutio have come to Lord Capulet's party in disguise. When Mercutio suggests that they should use the opportunity to create trouble with their enemy, Romeo disagrees, saying that the only reason he came was because of one of his dreams. Mercutio speaks then of Queen Mab, the queen of all dreams.

## **Sonata in B Minor, K. 87** Domenico Scarlatti.

## **Ah! Per Sempre!** Vincenzo Bellini

From I Puritani

England, during the English Civil War (1649) at the Castle ramparts near Plymouth, Sir Riccardo Forth, a Puritan, a suitor of Elvira – The daughter of Lord Walton. Riccardo laments with his friend Bruno about the loss of Elvira to the Cavalier Arturo Talbot

## **When Yesterday we met** Sergei Rachmaninoff

An account of a heart breaking encounter between two former lovers, this song demonstrates so clearly the composers personal idiom that included a pronounced lyricism, expressive breadth, structural ingenuity, and a tonal palette of rich, distinctive orchestral colors.

## **Sleep** Ivor Gurney

Ivor Gurney spent the last 15 years of his life incarcerated in a mental hospital. His story was to end in sadness – but Gurney was very much a 'child of joy' – a man with a zest for life, for friendship and for fun, but in the end, a helpless victim of mental instability. In 1913 Gurney, whose natural exuberance was often blighted by fits of depression, had found himself close to a nervous breakdown. Obligated to take time off from the Royal College of Music, he returned to Gloucestershire for a few idyllic weeks, living and working at the Severn-side village of Framilode. But by July 1914 he was back at college and able to write to his friend Will Harvey:

Dear Willy,

It's going Willy. It's going. Gradually the cloud passes and Beauty is a present thing, not merely an abstraction poets feign to honour. Willy, Willy, I have done 5 of the most delightful and beautiful songs you ever cast your beaming eyes upon. They are all Elizabethan – the words – and blister my kidneys, bisurate my magnesia if the music is not as English, as joyful, as tender as any lyric of all that noble host. Technique all right, and as to word setting – models. 'Orpheus', 'Tears', 'Under the Greenwood Tree', 'Sleep', and 'Spring'. How did such an undigested clod as I make them?

End.