

UCL Chamber Music Club



Newsletter No.9 October 2017

In this issue:

[Cycles, places, the grotesque and tradition – a walk through the 65th season of the Chamber Music Club - page 2](#)

[Meet the committee – Elizabeth Mooney - page 8](#)

[Joyful Company of Singers presents a concert 'Finland @ 100' - page 12](#)

[Patricia Kopatchinskaja: enfant terrible of the concert hall, promoting the music of today - page 12](#)

[Review: CMC masterclass for singers and accompanists in April 2017 - page 15](#)

[Around 1917 – Russian music's 'modernist' period - page 18](#)

[On summer, seasons, seas and sweet melancholy: exploring landscape in Swedish song - page 25](#)

Welcome to our newsletter

Welcome to the ninth issue of the Chamber Music Club Newsletter, and our fifth year of publication. We hope it will help you while away those lengthening autumn and winter evenings and provide some mental stimulation to keep you warm! As usual the contents are varied, but this time mostly related in one way or another to the CMC's activities. Last season's events are covered in a survey of our 2016/17 concerts and a review of the masterclass for singers and accompanists which took place in April. Two forthcoming concerts are put in context by articles on, respectively, the role of landscape in Swedish song, and Russian 'modernist' music before and after the 1917 Revolutions. The latest in our 'meet the committee' series features an interview with Elizabeth Mooney, a former Chair and the current Treasurer of the Club. In addition to her organisational, financial and musical skills, Liz is an intrepid and adventurous traveller, as the interview reveals. Not directly related to the CMC, but prompting some thought-provoking questions about the programming of 'classical' and contemporary music, is an introduction to the work of the versatile violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja.

As always, we are very pleased to receive items for the Newsletter, especially if you haven't written for us before. If you are thinking of submitting a full-length article (c.3000 words) it's a good idea to send us your proposal first. Shorter items, such as reviews of concerts and books, or letters to the editors, are very welcome. The tenth issue is scheduled for spring 2018. The editors are: Dace Ruklisa (dd.rr.tt@btinternet.com), Helene Albrecht (helene.albrecht@gmx.net), Jill House (j.house@ucl.ac.uk) and myself (rabeemus@gmail.com); do feel free to contact any of us about your potential contributions.

Thanks as ever to Dace, Helene and Jill for their hard work in producing this issue. We hope you enjoy reading it.

Roger Beeson, Deputy Chair, UCL CMC

Concert dates 2017-18

Lunchtime concerts begin at 1.10pm, and all others at 5.30pm unless otherwise stated.

Autumn term

Monday 9 October

Monday 16 October
(joint concert with Oxford and Cambridge Musical Club, starts at 7pm)

Tuesday 24 October

Wednesday 15 November

Monday 20 November, lunchtime

Saturday 25 November (starts at 5pm)

Thursday 7 December
(Christmas concert in Garden Room, starts at 6pm)

Spring term

Tuesday 16 January

Friday 26 January, lunchtime

Thursday 1 February, lunchtime

Friday 9 February, lunchtime

Monday 19 February

Friday 2 March, lunchtime

Tuesday 13 March

Summer term

Tuesday 1 May

Friday 18 May, lunchtime

Wednesday 30 May

Cycles, places, the grotesque and tradition – a walk through the 65th season of the Chamber Music Club

Looking at the programmes of last Chamber Music Club's season is like looking at planets through a telescope – plenty of previously unseen terrains and surfaces have become visible and diverse musical worlds have been uncovered. Among such planets entire chamber music cycles can be counted, also concerts devoted to a single composition and themed programmes involving a remarkable amount of research both within and outside the realms of music. Last autumn was marked by a lot of performances of nineteenth- and twentieth-century ensemble music – it was a welcome nod to the early tradition of the club to present chamber music works as a whole. Towards spring the tide was turning towards experimental programmes and no less experimental music, especially lesser heard compositions of the twentieth century. Now let us adjust lenses to look at some of these musical universes.

Contrasts were not lacking among and within the performances of complete chamber music works. Better known ensemble repertoire was represented by Mozart's Piano Trio in C major, K.548. In the first movement the piano set the

tempo and drove the piece forward; gracious piano phrases that involved refined ornamentation received vibrant and precise responses from violin and cello. The main theme of the second movement was introduced by the piano in such a dreamy way that it was tempting to linger within these sounds indefinitely. But then the instrumental parts became surprisingly independent and seemed to move in different directions – this well organised ‘disintegration’ was entrancing to listen to, with its melodic quirks and subtleties. For another piano trio – No.1 by Schumann – the third movement became the centre of gravity. Its eerie harmonies and unexpected timbral constellations, e.g. several instruments simultaneously playing in their lower registers, were emphasised by the performers and the movement ended in enigmatic harmonic ambiguity, perhaps enhanced by the absorption of string resonances within the Haldane Room. This had been preceded by a teasing second movement that was interpreted with levity and was full of swift and timbrally dry ascensions of melodies in violin and cello, played in slightly hushed dynamics – the performance evoked the grotesque and conveyed strange mirth. The dense and rhythmically ever-changing textures of the Second String Quartet by Kodály were expertly relayed by a guest ensemble from the Oxford and Cambridge Musical Club – various sections and themes were logically linked together and comprised a captivating development. Instruments were smoothly and frequently overtaking each other and giving impulses to the whole ensemble in turns.

Several concerts this season have been either devoted to a performance of a single piece or had a large scale piece at their centre. During the performance of Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater* I thought that it is surprising how affirmative the composer’s reading of this canonical Latin text was – the music sounded warm and was steadily moving towards a sort of catharsis experienced through grief. The ensemble brought out contrasts between the character of the music and the text – it was often underscoring hope in music while the narrative still dwelt on the harshest of experiences as in ‘*Quae moerebat et dolebat*’. In middle sections the timbres of the voices of the two soloists were exquisitely blended together; it was especially noticeable in ‘*Quis est homo qui non fleret*’ and within the fast and energetic interpretation of ‘*Fac ut ardeat cor meum*’. The compact ensemble (a single instrument in each group) was excellent in maintaining a balance of dynamics and themes within the polyphonic sections of the piece. It was a pleasure to hear lightly executed vocal decorations in ‘*Sancta Mater*’ and ‘*Inflammatum et accensus*’. In another concert dedicated to the music of Brahms, *Zigeunerlieder* Op.103 was performed. The cycle began with a considerable charge of energy and as if impatiently, with the piano rushing forward decisively while maintaining precise rhythm and the singer expressing freedom in full-bodied voice. Both the pianist and the soloist accentuated polyrhythmic sections and frequent syncopated rhythms, occasionally creating a mildly rambling and comical effect as in ‘*Brauner Bursche führt zum Tanze*’; also accelerations of tempi were efficiently used to communicate the text. These episodes were juxtaposed with lyrical and

even slightly daydreaming passages, e.g. within 'Kommt dir manchmal in den Sinn'.

However, some performances of longer pieces exchanged the intimacy of chamber music for a community effort. Thus a rendering of Terry Riley's *In C* united fifteen singers and instrumentalists: in addition to three voices there were recorders, flutes, piccolo, trumpets, violins, viola, cello, double bass and, of course, a piano present. Almost immediately, at the opening of the performance, a sense of broadness of space, created by varied instrumental timbres and registers, emerged – the performers did not spend too much time on the introductory section and chose to present the first wider chords very soon. The initial harmonies were as if inviting the procession to move forward and were very sonorous in their layout across various instruments. The first section was marked by mellifluous calls of trumpets. Later spirited cello remarks came to the foreground after which the cello outlined some alluring motifs from the score before descending to playing in the instrument's lower registers. In the middle section well-controlled and sustained vocal notes without vibrato accented the colours of the prevailing harmonies. The recorder player changed instruments from low to high and towards the end back to low and added plenty of nimble passages to the texture. Towards the finale the transition to a sparser texture was marked by the double bass player changing to pizzicatos and emphasising notes of minor chords.

This year's themed concerts have often involved thorough research of musical and extra-musical aspects of the theme and have tended to last longer than a standard CMC evening concert. A programme was dedicated to the anniversary of Shakespeare and comprised compositions influenced by the Bard's work. The evening began with an ensemble of a recorder, lyra, piccolo and harpsichord playing popular music from Shakespeare's time – *The Carman's Whistle* and *Callino Casturame*, the latter with William Byrd's variations. The performance exhibited a considered balance of dynamics and allowed each instrument to display its specific timbre when bringing to the fore short themes and while leading a galliard. Precise phrasing ensured a swift upsurge of various motifs and created a dynamic feel. Written around Shakespeare's time and used in the staging of *Macbeth*, the duet 'Come away Hecate' by Robert Johnson was performed with a theatrical flair – the capricious changes in intonation and dynamics by the soprano soloist seemed like an ironic commentary on dabbling in magic; this impression was enhanced by the precise timing and seriousness of remarks by the mezzo-soprano. The antidote to this was the traditional song 'Walsingham', followed by William Byrd's variations on the theme played on the harpsichord. The song began in a slightly fragile manner, with plain and deliberately unadorned singing, and gradually turned into a quiet defiance – there was something mesmerising in the unassuming performance. After the concert the audience was treated with a guided tour to an exhibition of Shakespeare-related manuscripts, presented by UCL Libraries – amidst

some of the seventeenth-century editions of plays it included the famous forgery of Shakespeare's writings by William Henry Ireland.

The fiftieth anniversary of Zoltán Kodály's death was celebrated no less lavishly: the programme involved instrumental ensembles, solo songs and choral pieces. Its preparation was aided by Margaret Green from the Institute of Education, an expert on the Kodály teaching method of singing (see the eighth Newsletter). The particular focus was on Kodály's early works in which we recognise the influences of French composers and of folk music. Within folk song arrangements for tenor voice and piano the pianist showed great care in delineating the metres, sometimes composite, characteristic of Hungarian music. It was interesting to hear how the meaning of the text was often conveyed via an accompaniment that was relatively repetitive and was subtly varied throughout a song, predominantly in terms of texture. The voice was freely and naturally flowing; occasionally syncopations and specific words were precisely accentuated (the singer had learned Hungarian remarkably well for the occasion!). Some songs were interpreted with a dose of bravado, like 'Now I've paid a hundred thalers'. The performers of the first movement of Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op.4, rendered the numerous juxtapositions of low registers of both instruments in varied ways in terms of timbre. This early piece seemed remarkably well composed – the frequently used low sonorities of the cello were not overwhelmed by the sound of the piano at any time. The middle section of the movement was wilfully moving forward and at times each instrument was as if spontaneously creating a new element within the overall texture.

Yet another themed concert celebrated the composers who have worked in London and been part of various London-based musical scenes. This programme was shaped by placing close to one another very old and fairly recent musical works. Representing older works, a sequence of Purcell's songs was presented. In 'Music for a While' the soprano was accompanied solely by a Baroque cello. The accompaniment was purposely fragmented, with pauses left for solo voice – cello phrases receded as quickly as they emerged and were angular, seemingly illustrating the 'drop' movement mentioned in the text. In the interpretation of 'The Sparrow and the Gentle Dove' the sweet sound and slightly lamenting timbre of the soprano voice was overlaid by staccato harpsichord playing and pointed cello strokes. The impression was both playful and melancholic, leaving listeners in some doubt about the nature of sacrifices fit for love. These songs were immediately followed by music by Cornelius Cardew – Paragraph 3 of *The Great Learning* and fragments from his *Treatise* were presented. The sonic landscape of Paragraph 3 was introduced by playing a single sustained note on the double bass that was soon reverberated by live electronics and reproduced with a delay alongside the playing of the instrument. The overall sound was replete with harmonic overtones and was later augmented by soprano voice. Gradually the double

bass's notes began to move around, morphing into new harmonies, and the trumpet enriched the chords with a drawn-out summons. The performance of *Treatise* involved the audience: people were asked to choose the page of its graphic score to be presented. The thirteenth page was chosen, decorated only with straight lines of various widths, looking very much like empty staves of music (true, some of these lines ended slightly before others). It was interpreted as an improvisation around a single gradually expanding chord, amalgamated from sounds conjured by instruments and voice and extended in time by live electronics. Sudden and precise outbursts of *forte* vocal notes shook up the piece. But even more contrast was created with Gershwin's 'A Foggy Day (in London Town)' – the performance revealed a noteworthy sense of swing and a mastery of the style of early jazz by both soloists.

Baroque music has appeared regularly in the club's concerts, albeit in very different instrumental guises. Three of Orlando Gibbons's Fantasias for two trebles were presented at a Baroque-themed concert. Already at the beginning of Fantasia No.1 an unusual compatibility between the timbres of the two instruments could be felt – it transpired later that treble recorders of similar make had been chosen for the performance. This piece is made up of numerous imitations and canons that are never too distant in terms of register – both performers demonstrated a lively interplay and precise blending of various motifs in terms of sound and dynamics. J.S. Bach's Chaconne was played on the same evening in the arrangement by Ferruccio Busoni for piano. Within the first section a dark and deep tone was maintained for the dense chords. Afterwards the development was both gradual and relentless, gaining impetus from staccato notes in medium register. All of this led to a light and contrasting plateau that seemed to be unobscured by the initial shadowy feel. Manfredini's Concerto grosso Op.3 No.12 was presented by a small string orchestra and continuo at the Christmas concert. Its first movement began in unrushed elegance, with flowing melodic lines filling the space of the North Cloisters and the two solo violins interweaving and varying musical themes in equable manner. In the subsequent movement the lyrical strands of the piece were revealed until in the third and final movement individual instrumental voices, in particular violins, came to the foreground to lead a dance with the orchestra. Baroque music was a significant ingredient of the last concert of the season when J.S. Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No.6 was performed in an arrangement for two recorders and continuo, executed on harpsichord and cello. Throughout the first movement the cello provided a proper rhythmical drive and musical intensity – its playing was characterised by a bright tone and sensitive surges in dynamics. In the meantime the recorders were sustaining long melodic lines: both recorder players precisely articulated beginnings of motifs and entrances and carried out smooth phrasing. In the second movement the recorder players developed the musical material with pronounced clarity and without any signs of haste, while being accompanied by slightly whimsical arpeggios on the harpsichord.

A special event for the club was the solo recital by our new Honorary President, Professor John Irving. He had chosen to present four of J.S. Bach's French Suites. In his devised sequence of the pieces fairly distant tonalities were juxtaposed and the alternations between major and minor seemed to create an overarching form (E flat major, D minor, B minor and E major). Overall sense of time was brought about by the choice of pauses (or their absence) between individual movements of suites. Often the last gigue was united with its preceding movement so that a gradual acceleration of tempo and intensification became possible towards the end of a suite. For instance, the Gigue of the E major suite was adjoined with its preceding Bourrée in a boisterous and jubilant interpretation and both movements were played with an ever increasing energy. By contrast, a sarabande tended to be separated from at least one of the neighbouring movements, which often made it a local culmination. All suites were linked with improvised modulating preludes that were executed with a considerable flexibility in texture and also with admirable economy – the present author was surprised to hear how swiftly the music landed in a different tonality and began to inhabit an altered harmonic space (remember the remote tonalities of suites). Different stops of the harpsichord were used throughout the performance – in particular these helped in expanding and enriching the sound within some of the fast movements (e.g. Gigue of E flat major suite), when the lowest register of the instrument was used.

As usual, our club has been welcoming guests from UCLU Music Society. In their concert a duet of countertenors performed vocal music by Purcell. 'Sound the trumpet' was presented in a relaxed fashion and tempo – this allowed enough time for both performers to savour elegant decorations and trills in the vocal parts. Similar lightness was exhibited in 'No, resistance is but vain' – here both countertenors had to sing in a rather high tessitura while maintaining the clarity of the text, flirtatiously expounding on the inevitable progress of love.

Club members have made many a short musical form memorable through their interpretations. At the opening concert of the season five of Frank Bridge's *Miniatures* for piano trio were presented – it seems that the movements had been selected to distil maximum contrasts from the cycle. Stylisations of more and less ancient dances were relayed in a playful manner and in Romance and Valse Russe a pensive lyricism was underlined. At another concert dedicated to Schubert's music, the interpretation of 'Erlafsee' initially evoked blissful forgetfulness before reminiscing on darker dispositions through images of nature – after this a return to abandoned dreaming in the reprise of the first section was all the more enjoyable; the piano accompaniment was very sensitive and smoothly moved through different rhythms and moods. 'An die Musik' revealed both yearning towards and contentment found within music and was sung with a sense of grace; the performers retained a relatively slow tempo. Michael Tippett's *Songs for Ariel* seemed endlessly mutable in terms of their multi-coloured harmonies. The mezzo-soprano

was deftly switching between different styles of singing and between impersonating barking of dogs and a shriek of a rooster while the piano playing was sparse and diaphanous. The performer of *Five Bagatelles* for piano by Carl Vine crisply outlined various piano textures and created pronounced distinctions between movements. The piano pedal was used with great care either to retain the transparency of chords and to trace subtle changes in the colour of the harmony or to produce varied resonances. The culmination of the cycle was its last movement that left an impression of lucidity and surreal calm. At the final concert of the season a vivid wrestling with overwhelming passions could be experienced in music of Scriabin – both the fourteenth prelude from Op.11 and Etude Op.8 No.12 were played as if with restlessness and fully embracing the pianistic writing of the composer as well as contrasts in piano registers and timbres. On that same evening two pieces for guzheng, a type of zither that is played by plucking strings and is traditional in Chinese music, were presented. The melody of the ancient ‘Fisherman’s Song at Dusk’ was slowly and incrementally varied and bending the strings added an additional diversity to the modes of the music used.

The beginning of next season promises to be rich in themed concerts. Already in October a programme of ‘Op.1’ pieces will be presented, with works by Roger Quilter, Alban Berg, Sergei Prokofiev and Hugh Wood. This season the centenary of the Russian Revolution will be marked with music by modernist and avant-garde Russian composers from both pre- and post-revolutionary years. In November the role of landscape in Swedish song will be explored. A lot of ensemble playing can be expected in two concerts in late November, including some nineteenth century quartets and quintets. So musical terrains of widely varying familiarity will be explored in CMC concerts.

Dace Ruklisa

Meet the committee – Elizabeth Mooney

TREASURER OF UCL CHAMBER MUSIC CLUB AND CHAIR FROM 2010 TO 2013

(TO FELLOW COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND EDITORS OF THE CMC NEWSLETTER ELIZABETH MOONEY IS KNOWN AS LIZ AND IS THUS ADDRESSED IN THE CONVERSATION.)

Helene Albrecht: *Dear Liz, thank you so much for your willingness to do this interview for the UCL Chamber Music Club’s Newsletter. You are one of our most experienced committee members and we have waited for a while to learn about the many roles you have taken on within the Club. You are a frequent performer and concert organiser and were Chair between 2010 and 2013. Currently you are also the Club’s Treasurer and have been in this role since 2014. Do you remember how and why you got involved?*

Elizabeth Mooney: When I joined UCL I was very happy to find out that there was a music club and got involved as music has always been my hobby. I enjoy the varied opportunities to perform, as the Club's concerts present music of many styles in a variety of settings. I also enjoy singing in the Club's choir around Christmas as singing is not something I get to do at any other time of the year. As far as I remember it was in a concert in 2008 that I was approached by Jill House who asked me if I would like to join the committee. From then onwards I became more involved and in 2010 I ended up as Chair.

HA: *Would you say that this position meant an extra challenge, in other words, did the position bring about more rewards or more worries?*

EM: It certainly brought about more worries, but was rewarding as well. As a Chair, you have to be visible, to attend the concerts and to appreciate and promote the work of performers and concert organisers. In my case I had the advantage, through my work in the UCL Finance and Business Affairs division, of having a good relationship with the Provost (at that time it was Professor Malcolm Grant) and his team and therefore being able to better manage some organisational challenges such as storage of our harpsichord in the Provost's Office, where it is still kept today. We also invited him to become our Honorary President in the 2011-12 season, a position he held for a five-year term. The challenges of being the UCL CMC Chair can be tricky when it comes to logistics such as room bookings and intensive correspondence. The latter is essential for joint projects such as collaborations with the Oxford and Cambridge Musical Club (OCMC) or with RUMS, the medical student music society, which have been very successful and enjoyable. In general, the CMC prospers on grounds of hard work and team efforts of the committee. The dedication of the committee and Club members who always present such high quality performances made the job very rewarding, and I very much enjoyed my time as Chair.

HA: *During my years with the CMC I often found that you have a talent of bringing particular repertoires to attention: exotic and less well known musical works, not to mention a programme based on electronic music. Can you tell us a bit about this?*

EM: I have to admit that I like doing things that are a bit different... One of my early programmes, for instance, was titled 'Myths and Legends' where the music featured pieces that had a story behind them such as *Syrinx* by Debussy for solo flute (performed by me) which set the scene at the beginning of the concert. The recent concert programme with electronic music followed two strands. Firstly, I wanted to introduce electronic music to the Club where we otherwise play acoustic instruments only. Secondly, I wanted to explore the mixture of acoustic and electronic music sounds within the same piece. The whole concept was triggered by an encounter with the modern composer Ian Clarke whom I met at a flute course. Ian uses extended instrumental techniques in his music and I particularly liked his piece for solo flute accompanied by a backing track called TRKs, which was

my inspiration for this concert. I then found an experimental group of musicians who used the piano in unconventional ways and incorporated recordings and improvisations into their pieces. They played, together with the prominent oboist Christopher Redgate who premiered a piece composed by Edwin Roxburgh, who attended the concert. All very interesting stuff...

HA: *The way you describe these projects reveals that there must be more to your music-making than just being a hobby. What is your background in music?*

EM: I picked up the recorder when I was five or six years old, and when I was eight I decided to swap to the full-sized flute, a bit unusual for a child of that age. However, my parents managed to find a young graduate who was willing to teach me. Aged sixteen I achieved Grade 8 with Distinction and was offered a music scholarship at a boarding school in Kent that specialised in music. I did my GCSEs and A levels in music and was taught piano and percussion, both of which I brought up to Grade 6 standard. I studied English and Music at Keele University and became the university orchestra's principal flautist and principal percussionist in my second and third years respectively... After university and some time spent travelling I did an MA in Music (Performance) at Christ Church College in Canterbury and worked part-time as a music and drama teacher for a secondary school. However, I was not sure about becoming a classroom teacher and therefore happily took an offer to work for the BBC. I did a variety of roles at the BBC. A highlight was a nine-month secondment as a Production Assistant in the TV Classical Music department. I was fortunate enough to be able to work on the Proms, and on concerts at the Barbican and in other places; a challenging job where I was in control of everything! However, this role did not leave much time to pursue my musical hobbies and so I went back to my main line of work which was in administration and project management. In 2006 I was made redundant from the BBC, and after a brief stint at Scottish Power I came to work at UCL. My current professional life allows me to apply and to combine both sides of me: my musical and my administrative-management skills.

HA: *But this is not the full story! You are also a keen traveller and recently took a three-months career break in order to explore new regions. What exactly have you been up to?*

EM: Oh, I need to show you my photo album! I just wanted to do something unusual and to achieve something worthwhile at the same time. My first stop was in Nepal, where I visited Everest Base Camp and bought a wonderful Nepalese flute which I then took with me to the Galapagos Islands. On the island of San Cristobal (in the Galapagos) I taught music and English in a volunteering programme for two weeks. I composed a piece of music for the Nepalese wooden flute and performed it at a cultural event in my second week over there. The piece was inspired by the island's natural environment: its beaches, sea lions and the beautiful sunsets, and afterwards I donated the Nepalese flute to the

programme. Another amazing place I visited was Tokyo, where I bought a new open-hole silver flute which will enable me to perform a wider range of music using more extended techniques.

HA: *Does this mean that we will hear you at UCL in the near future playing your new instrument?*

EM: To be honest, I have quite a sizeable workload to manage at the moment and there are no specific concerts I am planning to organise; however I will be performing on the piccolo in the next collaborative concert with the OCMC in October! While I was away I kept a blog about my journeys and am considering writing a book about all my travels around the globe. I have been travelling since 1996 and my first foray into the world was a backpacking trip to South East Asia for around four months. In those days there was no access to mobile phones and the internet and I found the experience quite a cultural shock. This did not dent my exploring spirit, and after my redundancy from the BBC I went on a month's journey, taking in India, Dubai and Sri Lanka. Other places I have visited over the years are Indonesia, Java, Vietnam, Laos, Bali, Cambodia, Nicaragua, South Africa, Singapore... you name it!

HA: *And I know that you have also travelled to South America, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Uruguay, Argentina... what about the United States and Canada?*

EM: I decided to leave this until retirement as these countries are much more accessible places...

HA: *Fair enough! This is very impressive and we can only wish you best of luck for future explorations! Just to conclude: what are your hopes and aspirations for UCL Chamber Music Club and where would you personally like us to go?*

EM: I have always loved the Club's openness towards the wider UCL family, including staff, alumni, and students. I would wish that we continue to present high-quality concerts showcasing a variety of different kinds of music to appeal to as wide an audience as possible, and in our collaborations promote music across UCL and beyond.

HA: *Dear Liz, thank you very much for sharing your time and colourful life experiences and hope to hear you very soon again in some of the Club's concerts!*

You can visit Liz's website at: <<https://lizmooney.net>>

Joyful Company of Singers presents a concert 'Finland @ 100'

The vocal group Joyful Company of Singers and conductor Peter Broadbent will present a concert dedicated to the hundredth anniversary of Finland's independence in late November. The programme will include choral works by Sibelius, Rautavaara and Mäntyjärvi (Finland), Pärt (Estonia), Ešenvalds and Vasks (Latvia), Miškinis and Kairytė (Lithuania) and Jackson and Vaughan Williams (UK). The concert will take place on Thursday 30th November and start at 7.30pm. It will be held in St. Katharine Cree, Leadenhall Street, London EC3A 3BP. Tickets are £15 or £10 (concessions) – these are available via Eventbrite (<www.eventbrite.co.uk>).

Patricia Kopatchinskaja: enfant terrible of the concert hall, promoting the music of today

I increasingly believe that to create effective art, we have to create delirium, and yes, organize it.

Pierre Boulez (Griffiths 2010, 95)

Wigmore Hall, April 2017. Patricia Kopatchinskaja is not scared to tease her audience. Barefoot, she enters the stage with her partner Sol Gabetta and starts the evening with magical, witty, almost inaudible miniatures by Xenakis. These are followed by a short, playful Scarlatti interlude and soon she is back to the contemporary; throughout the concert works by Ligeti, Ravel, Widmann, Kodály and Eötvös are all interspersed with short pieces by Bach and Scarlatti. Already the programme makes it clear that the Moldovan-Austrian violinist wants to take the listeners out of their comfort zone.

With her whimsical and almost wicked presence, she absorbs the audience into her adventurous and imaginative playing. Each piece is presented as a separate universe, in which every little detail is brought out with creativity and intelligence. 'The identity of the artist is the way in which he plays', she wrote in a Guardian article before her Wigmore concert series this year (Kopatchinskaja, 2016). Indeed, she embodies the many characters of each piece with immense intensity and conviction. At the end of the concert the audience seems at once exhausted and enchanted by Kopatchinskaja's wild and poetic playing.

Patricia Kopatchinskaja has been on the front stage of the classical music scene for several years now. A daughter of two Moldovan folk musicians, she grew

up in very modest surroundings and the country's political instability made the family move to Austria. There she had to play the violin and piano in restaurants and streets with her parents to help sustain the family (Mitic, 2016). But soon afterwards she enrolled in the Vienna Academy of Music, then in the Hochschule der Künste in Bern, where she later settled down with her husband and daughter. Her career was launched early on and she collaborated with orchestras such as the Berliner Philharmoniker, London Symphony Orchestra and Theodor Currentzis's Musica Aeterna (Kopatchinskaja and Perrot, 2015). Always searching for like-minded, experimental, and risk-taking partners, she has been playing with young musicians including Theodor Currentzis, Sol Gabetta and Polina Leschenko.

Kopatchinskaja's repertoire is vast, and although its main focus lies on modern and contemporary music, she oftentimes includes Classical and Baroque pieces in her programmes. However, she chooses to present classical pieces in radically new perspectives and lights, often with a provocative undertone; sounds and textures usually found in contemporary music seem to permeate her interpretations of Bach, Mozart and Beethoven. These reinterpretations do not only have the effect of surprise but also allow for new insights into this music. Too often the great composers are played in almost the same perfectly polished and one-dimensional way. 'Wouldn't some madness be preferable to this normality?' (Kopatchinskaja, 2016)

Her main focus remains contemporary music. The Moldovan violinist has proven to be one of its great advocates. Her concerts have not only made the audiences of the concert halls accustomed to the music of today, but in many cases also curious and interested to discover hitherto unknown sounds. She not only performs the well-known masterpieces of the twentieth century (which could still achieve the listener's conservative satisfaction), but includes music from composers still active today. For instance, as the new director of the Camerata Bern, she has introduced an internet platform for young composers to submit their works, from which pieces will then be selected and eventually performed by the ensemble and their leader.

One of Kopatchinskaja's recent projects involves the performing of the music of Galina Ustvolskaja, one of the most idiosyncratic composers from twentieth-century Russia. She was the creator of brutal, desperate and crude music from the times of Soviet totalitarianism. As Patricia Kopatchinskaja put it in her blog *The Kitchen*, Ustvolskaja's music '[has] no space for beauty. In order to rise to the expressive power of this music, the interpretation has to go to the extremes.' This rarely performed music takes the listener to the border of the bearable, offering mystical visions of horror, loneliness and spiritual bleakness (Service, 2013). With openness and curiosity Kopatchinskaja offers us escapes into the most obscure and unknown musical worlds.

In contrast to this violent and dark music stands her interest in folk music.

Pieces by George Enescu, Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály have oftentimes been at the centre of her programmes. Coming from the impressionist and modernist traditions, these composers have based much of their work on the folk music of their respective cultures. Kopatchinskaja's energetic and playful renditions of these folkish pieces make for a thrilling and joyful concert experience. Having been raised in a family of folk musicians, and although having oriented herself very early towards classical music, this part of her past remains consistently present in her playing today.

Most concert halls nowadays have a bigger resemblance to a museum than to a lively place of artistic performance and exchange of ideas. This should be changed. As a growing number of musicians and composers are proposing, at least fifty percent of each concert's programme should ideally consist of works by contemporary composers. Maybe to some concert-goers this may seem unrealistic and provocative. But we can see with Kopatchinskaja's concerts that this can make for an entertaining and interesting contrast to the boringly conservative and repetitive traditional concert programmes.

It is not just a provocation or a single-minded search for originality that make her stand out of the crowd. Patricia Kopatchinskaja does not merely play the music, but speaks from her soul as a young contemporary artist. With her playing she reflects the chaotic, often disoriented feelings in society and confronts them in a playful and humorous way. In times of great political turmoil and societal insecurities, the concert hall should not merely serve as an escape from reality. Rather than hide in an illusory, ideal world of perfectly polished classics, we should confront the realities of our century.

Patricia Kopatchinskaja has been introducing the concert goer to the world of contemporary music in a playful, fresh and interesting way. Engaging and intense playing enables her imaginative and intelligent interpretations to reach the audience. As a promoter and defender of contemporary music, she has been risk-taking and provocative and has put herself at the heart of the present-day arts. A real musician of TODAY.

Luc Poveromo

You can find Patricia Kopatchinskaja on the following links.

'Being Pat': Patricia Kopatchinskaja, violinist (A short and artful presentation of her persona.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuspQkf1Z1Q>

Patricia Kopatchinskaja – Giya Kancheli, Rag-Gidon-Time (This encore was given at a concert at Wigmore Hall with pianist Polina Leschenko and shows perfectly her witty character and talent for 'speaking the music'.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5G8n2Ewf40g>

REFERENCES

- Griffiths, Paul, 2010: 'Extension and Development: Western Europe 1953-1956' in *Modern Music and after*, 3rd edition (New York: Oxford University Press), p.95
- Kopatchinskaja, Patricia, 2016: 'Patricia Kopatchinskaja: we all need the madness in our worlds' in *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media (5th February, 2016)
<<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/feb/05/patricia-kopatchinskaja-changing-minds-festival-schumann-kurtag>>
- Kopatchinskaja, Patricia, 'G. Ustvolskaja – music from the times of totalitarianism' in *Patricia's Kitchen*, retrieved on 12th October 2017
<<http://patriciakopatchinskaja.com/texts-USTWOLSKAJA-patkop.html>>
- Kopatchinskaja, Patricia, and Perrot, Harrison, 2015: 'Biography – Patricia Kopatchinskaja' in *Season 2015/2016*, retrieved on the 5th October 2017
<<http://patriciakopatchinskaja.com/index.php/biography/biography-english/>>
- Mitic, G.B., 2016: 'Wild Child of Violin on a Meteoric Rise' in *The New York Times* (24th August, 2016)
<<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/24/arts/international/wild-child-of-violin-on-a-meteoric-rise.html>>
- Service, Tom, 2013: 'A guide to Galina Ustvolskaya's music' in *The Guardian* (8th April 2013)
<<https://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2013/apr/08/contemporary-music-guide-galina-ustvolskaya>>

Review: CMC masterclass for singers and accompanists in April 2017

Following the highly successful piano masterclasses for the Club's members held in 2016, another masterclass took place in April 2017, this time for singers and their accompanists.

The organisation of the event was similar to the previous year's piano masterclasses: the Club's members were invited to submit their repertoire choices and the CMC committee selected and appointed a highly qualified tutor. This time we were fortunate to recruit the mezzo-soprano Alison Wells, a teacher in high demand who runs her own studio and is a member of the vocal studies departments at the Royal College of Music and Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. Alison is also an accomplished pianist and has a background in mathematics, making her an ideal candidate for the interdisciplinary environment and

chamber musicians' diverse backgrounds at UCL.

In correspondence to CMC's varied musical programmes technical and musical demands of participants were broad. Five singers and their accompanists presented a range of songs and arias from the Baroque to the modern period. How to bring to life the six verses of Franz Schubert's setting of Goethe's 'Schäfers Klagelied' ('Shepherd's Lament') became the main challenge for Mark Gavartin, baritone, and Chon Lam, pianist and organist (both from the Medical School); an experienced duo that is well known to CMC members. It was fascinating how Alison opened up fresh paths into interpretation. The song's rich images of nature expressed in the piano accompaniment lost all meaning after the disappearance of the shepherd's beloved one; the task of communicating this required Mark to step into the shepherd's shoes and embody tiredness, experience and sadness through facial, physical and musical expression. This exercise even involved the question of how old the protagonist might be, a question that the singer quite precisely answered: to him he was an experienced shepherd, roughly forty years old, and wandering through familiar tracks in the mountains. Discussion as to how to convey this musically resulted in adjustments to the singer's method of sound production: Mark's head was gently pulled back and he positioned the stand with the score much higher than usual. Subsequently the sound could be projected differently and more easily into the hall. Not only did Mark's voice sound stronger as a result, the German text could also be communicated more efficiently. Experimenting with different choices of key was also helpful and revealed that a transposition suited Mark's voice much better. Care was also given to the accompaniment, which, although being played delicately and sensitively, yet had to distinguish between purely supportive passages and the taking of a proactive role in translating the natural scenery into music. In this context the accompanist's background in organ playing was discussed and comparisons were drawn between presenting various keyboard textures on both instruments.

The second contribution came from Geneviève Usher, soprano (former member of staff) and Helene Albrecht (alumna, Law School). Geneviève, a passionate and experienced performer, had picked two contrasting items: the arioso 'Care selve' from George Frederick Handel's opera *Atalanta* and Claude Debussy's 'Pierrot' from *Quatre chansons de jeunesse*. For the interpretation of 'Care selve' Geneviève was initially asked to pronounce the first words in an intonation that would convey a pleasure and satisfaction at looking over the forests that are part of the text. It transpired that the singer had studied Italian at university; after a few trials of speaking the text she began to feel very comfortable with it and found a new approach towards creating a freely flowing sound. This preparation was necessary and effective because the first vocal phrases were very high and had to be sustained for a long time. While the tender and inward-looking aria required a reduction in vibrato, carefully balanced dynamics and effortless mastery

of its decorative texture, Debussy's 'Pierrot' invited the opposite: erratic and extroverted melodic lines in the singing voice interrupted by piano passages that in complicity with Pierrot's caprices elfishly quote the French lullaby 'Au clair de la lune'. Alison pushed both singer and accompanist to greater presence and towards handling disruptive changes of dynamics and colours.

The following contribution was Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's aria 'Ach, ich fühls' ('Ah, I feel it') from *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute) performed by Dawn Williams, soprano (Civil, Environmental and Geomatic Engineering) and Sarah Wise, piano (Lecturer in the Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis). This aria has its challenge in long, intense passages followed by coloraturas which can only be mastered through efficient breathing techniques. Alison helped Dawn to achieve greater effortlessness and a greater focus to the sound by imagining the rise of the latter from the spine into the back of the head, then using a cantilevered gesture to pull the sound out of the body. We all held our breath, impressed by the immediate effect! Another interesting discussion centred on conveying of the mood of the song – Alison encouraged dissatisfied complaining and lamenting in singing as these seemed appropriate for the situation when a lover is ignoring the heroine of the opera.

After a short break we continued our class with two songs from Gustav Mahler's settings of poems by Friedrich Rückert. Jill House, mezzo-soprano (former member of staff), and Yvonne Cheng, piano (alumna, Bartlett School of Architecture), presented 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen' ('I am lost to the world') and 'Liebst du um Schönheit' ('If you love for beauty'). Alison encouraged both performers to allow for more spacious tempi and to pay closer attention to Mahler's detailed instructions which created a sphere of transfiguration. To Jill she also revealed better ways of breath control, a new and eluding measure with immediate effect: one method offered involved Jill pushing against the piano in order to enhance her breathing and adjust her body posture in a different way. 'I am lost to the world' required a lot of stamina in sustaining the long phrases that had to remain continuous and with help of this new technique these challenges were gradually overcome.

Moving forward from late Romantic art song to modern arrangements of folk songs we concluded this year's masterclass with Benjamin Britten. Alice Beverley, soprano (English), accompanied by Helene Albrecht on the piano, had selected three contrasting pieces: 'The trees they grow so high' – the description of a life cycle, its aspirations and despairs that were beautifully traced in the accompaniment's texture; 'How sweet the answer' – a tender and fragile love song; and 'At the mid hour of night' – another love song, this time telling about fulfilled but remote affection. Alice, whose bright singing voice matches very well the song's clarity, was advised to look more deeply at the lyrics and gain fresh inspiration for emphasis and flow in her interpretation. Alice was also asked whether she had

been listening to other interpretations of these songs. It turned out that she had heard quite a lot of renderings and had concluded that she does not want to add too many decorations or theatricality. Alison responded that care must be taken to avoid boredom in the interpretation of a strophic song such as ‘The trees they grow so high’; a remedy for this is to focus closely on telling the story implied in the lyrics and to think how to anticipate significant events of the narrative in the voice. Together we realised that even the initial lines of this poem potentially suggest that the story will not end well.

The masterclass for singers and accompanists was a most rewarding experience for active and passive participants alike. The beauty and calmness of the Haldane Room on a sunny Saturday afternoon literally overlaid all that had been sung, said, taught and tried out with a golden ray. A truly rewarding experience for all, the tutor, the performers and the audience alike. Thanks to our Chair Dace Ruklisa and to the CMC committee who were responsible for its organisation!

Masterclasses for CMC Members are now becoming a regular feature of the club. The next one is being planned for next spring and will be given by our Honorary President John Irving who is a Professor of Performance Practice, fortepianist and harpsichordist. The class will focus on eighteenth-century performance practice and involve diverse instruments and voices.

Helene Albrecht

Around 1917 – Russian music’s ‘modernist’ period

The early decades of the twentieth century were a time of great turmoil and upheaval in Russia’s political, social and economic life. The nation’s defeat by Japan in the war of 1904/5 and the failed and harshly suppressed popular revolution of 1905 were followed by ultimately unsuccessful attempts at reform. Participation in the First World War, with its consequent privations and its revelation of the inadequacies of the ruling military and civilian structures, proved fatal for the tsarist regime. The democratic revolution of February 1917 put an end to the monarchy. The subsequent Provisional Government coexisted uneasily with an alternative centre of power, the soviets (councils of workers, soldiers and peasants); arguably its major error was to continue (under pressure from the Allies) to take part in the war, with no conclusive victorious outcome in sight. There followed the revolution of October 1917 – in fact a coup by Vladimir Lenin’s Bolsheviks, whose slogan was ‘peace, land and bread’. (Russia at this time, it should be noted, was still using the old Julian calendar, long abandoned by other countries in favour of the Gregorian. The latter was adopted in February 1918. While the revolutions of 1917 are universally referred to as those of February and October, by the ‘new style’ calendar they in fact took place in, respectively, March and November.) The

treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918 took Russia out of the First World War, with extensive loss of territory. Wars against internal and external forces between 1918 and 1921 involved extreme hardship for the population and a policy of 'war communism', with complete government control of resources. With the end of the Civil War, Lenin introduced a 'New Economic Policy' (NEP) to revive the economy by allowing a degree of private enterprise. The country became formally the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR, Soviet Union) in 1922. Lenin's death in January 1924 was followed by a power struggle inside the ruling party (now officially called the Communist Party), with Joseph Stalin eventually emerging victorious over his main rival Leon Trotsky.

This was also a period of rich artistic creativity in Russia. The symbolist poetry of Alexander Blok, the 'acmeism' of Nikolai Gumilev, Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandelstam, and the 'futurism' of Velimir Khlebnikov and Vladimir Mayakovsky were among the outstanding literary products of the pre-war 'silver age'. In the field of visual arts, amidst a plethora of '-isms' – futurism, suprematism, constructivism, to name a few – Vasily Kandinsky, Marc Chagall and Kazimir Malevich were among those who produced ground-breaking work. In music, among the younger generation of composers, Igor Stravinsky and Sergei Prokofiev in particular gained international reputations (and lived in the West, Stravinsky permanently from 1914, Prokofiev from 1918 until his final return to the USSR in 1936). They and many others followed a 'modernist' path. The later music of Alexander Scriabin (1871-1915), in a style which approached atonality, was a particular influence on younger composers. While 1917 was in so many ways a pivotal year in Russian history, in the arts there was a good deal of continuity between the pre- and post-Revolutionary periods.

Immediately after the Bolshevik takeover, a Ministry of Public Education, or People's Commissariat of Education – Narkompros (*Narodny komissariat prosveshcheniya*) – was set up. It was headed by Anatoly Lunacharsky, and its music section was initially run by Arthur Lourié. They are interesting figures. Lunacharsky (1875-1933) was both a committed communist and a man of broad culture. He had studied philosophy at Zurich University, and was a keen connoisseur of music and the arts, about which he wrote extensively in addition to his political journalism. Like Lenin, Trotsky and other revolutionaries, he spent many years in exile abroad, and like them he returned to Russia following the revolution of February 1917. He retained his commissar's post in charge of Narkompros until 1929; he was then sidelined to become chairman of the Academic Committee of the USSR's Central Executive Committee. Appointed Soviet ambassador to Spain in 1933 he died in France in December of that year on his way to take up the post. (One could speculate that had he lived for a few more years he might well have been recalled to the Soviet Union and been a victim of Stalin's purges.) Lunacharsky's achievements at Narkompros were considerable, both in education

– notably the spread of literacy – and in ensuring state subsidies for and public access to the arts.

Lourié (1892-1966) studied piano at St Petersburg Conservatoire, but was largely self-taught as a composer. His early works reveal the influences of Debussy and Scriabin. Like many Russian composers he liked to use French titles, but he went a little further than others by deliberately referring to works by Debussy in the titles of his two piano pieces Op.2 (1910): the overall title is *Deux Estampes*; No.1 is called 'Crépuscule d'un faune', No.2 'Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répètent' (compare Debussy's *Estampes* for piano, his *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, and 'Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir' from the first book of Preludes). Lourié also demonstrated at an early stage an interest in radical experimentation, composing a microtonal string quartet in 1910. It is, however, for a relatively short period that his output can be considered genuinely avant-garde. The three piano pieces *Formes dans l'air* (1915) exemplify this experimental period: while they use varied repetition of motivic figures, they are atonal, dissonant and lack obvious continuity – comparison with the aphoristic atonal works of Schoenberg's 'Second Viennese School' is unavoidable. The presentation of the score is itself eccentric. While dynamic markings are plentiful, there are no tempo indications and no time-signatures or bar-lines. The notes are set out on staves, but the staves are not full-length or continuous: short pieces of staff are set against blank areas of the page in a sort of 'cut and paste' way – a visual representation of the title's 'forms in the air'. The work is dedicated to Pablo Picasso, which may also help to explain its appearance on the page – a sort of notational cubism, perhaps.

Lourié travelled to Berlin in an official capacity in 1921/22, but did not return to Russia. He settled in Paris in 1924, where he remained until 1941 when he moved to the USA, eventually becoming an American citizen. His reasons for thus going into exile must be a matter for speculation, but presumably included dissatisfaction – indeed, disillusion – with the authoritarian Bolshevik government (especially perhaps its anti-religious policies: born to a Jewish family, Lourié was a convert to Catholicism), and the difficulties and privations of life during the years of civil war after the Revolution, as well as the hostility of some musicians to his avant-gardism. Others who left Russia permanently during this period included the artists Chagall and Kandinsky (both of whom, like Lourié, had held positions in Narkompros).

In Paris, Lourié developed a strong personal and professional bond with Stravinsky, whose music he greatly admired. He transcribed for piano various of Stravinsky's works, notably the Octet and the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*. His own musical style abandoned extreme avant-gardism, and like Stravinsky he adopted a 'neo-classical' musical language; modal and chant-like elements are also evident in religious works such as the *Sonate liturgique* (1928) and the *Concerto spirituale* (1928-9). The influence did not go just one way: it has been suggested that there

is some connection between Lourié's *Little Chamber Music* for string orchestra (1924) and Stravinsky's ballet *Apollon musagète* (1927), likewise for strings; between the *Concerto spirituale* for choirs, brass, timpani, piano (originally two pianos) and double basses and Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* (1930) for choir, woodwind and brass, timpani, two pianos and lower strings; and even between the 'cut and paste' notation of *Formes dans l'air* and the style of notation used in some of Stravinsky's late serial works.

Despite the departure of figures such as Lourié, much of the 1920s (especially with the end of the Civil War and the implementation of Lenin's NEP in 1921) was a period of excitement and experimentation in the visual and musical arts. Although state control was exerted there was no single 'party line' at this stage about the kind of music that should be composed and performed. Lunacharsky himself, while respectful of the legacy of the artistic past, was supportive of new movements in the arts. Lenin had conservative tastes (though he was enthusiastic about the propagandist potential of the new art of cinema), and insisted that traditional styles and genres should not be jettisoned in the new society. 'We must take all the culture that capitalism has left us...all knowledge of art. Without this we cannot build the life of the communist society.' (Quoted in Roberts, *Modernism in Russian Piano Music*, p.5.) In a similar vein, introducing a performance for an audience of workers of Glinka's opera *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (based on a poem by Pushkin), Lunacharsky said: 'Pushkin and Glinka were noblemen and estate-owners. Let them have their nobility and their belongings. We are concerned only about their talent and their creations. The opera *Ruslan and Lyudmila* is a beautiful diamond in the crown of Russian art. Up to now you were not given the opportunity to be in contact with Russian art. Now you are here. The worker of Petrograd is offered a valuable cup of a marvellous, sparkling wine. Drink and enjoy it!' (Quoted in Haas, *Leningrad's Modernists*, p.3.)

In 1923 the Association for Contemporary Music (*Assotsiatsiya sovremennoy muzyki* – ASM) was founded to foster both new music by Russian composers and contacts with musicians in the West. While avant-garde composers such as Nikolai Roslavets (1881-1944) and Alexander Mosolov (1900-1973) played an important role, the ASM was by no means restricted to extreme radicals: for example, the membership included Roslavets's contemporary and Mosolov's teacher, Nikolai Myaskovsky (1881-1950), a rather moderate 'modernist' (and an indefatigable composer of symphonies – he notched up a total of twenty-seven in the course of his career).

During the 1920s, thanks to the efforts of Lunacharsky's Ministry and the ASM, Russian audiences were able to hear visiting Western performers and new music from abroad by a range of composers including Schoenberg, Bartók and Hindemith. The French composer Darius Milhaud visited in 1926 and was impressed by the size and musical understanding of mainly working-class audiences,

and by the standards achieved in musical training at the Leningrad (formerly St Petersburg/Petrograd) Conservatoire: ‘...the work accomplished there is far more thorough and valuable than that done in the Paris Conservatoire.’ (‘G.F.’, ‘Music in “Red” Russia’, p.132.) Alban Berg’s opera *Wozzeck* was staged in 1927 in a production praised by the composer. Although they were émigrés, Stravinsky and Prokofiev also had works performed. Connections went both ways: in Berlin in 1927 Bruno Walter conducted the First Symphony by the young Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-75), to great acclaim. An agreement in 1927 for joint publication between the State Publishing House in Moscow and Universal Edition in Vienna resulted in numerous contemporary Russian scores becoming available in the West.

Experimentation was rife. The possibilities of microtonal music, already tried out by Lourié and further developed by the émigré Ivan Vishnegradsky (1893-1979), were explored by a number of composers: a Society for Quarter-tone Music was established in 1923 by Georgi Rimsky-Korsakov (grandson of the famous composer). Expanded instrumental resources included the theremin, an electronic instrument first exhibited in 1919 and named after its eponymous inventor. In Moscow a conductorless orchestra was formed, by which Milhaud again was impressed: ‘Technical efficiency is truly extraordinary, and the upshot is excellent, each individual member of the orchestra being solely responsible for his part, and yet fusing it into the whole in a remarkable way.’ (Ibid.)

Composers were concerned with modern life – which of course included industry and mechanised transport. Mosolov’s best-known piece, from 1926/7, is the orchestral work *Zavod* (meaning ‘Factory’, often known in English as ‘Iron Foundry’), which started life as the first section of a ballet *Stal* (‘Steel’). Its use of ostinato, as well as being obviously appropriate to the subject matter, is a characteristic device of Mosolov. The orchestration is famous for including a ‘thin iron sheet’ in the percussion section. Daily life of a different kind is to be found in Mosolov’s brief song-cycle *Four Newspaper Announcements* (1926). The title is accurate: they are simply settings of items from the press, in a style which has been described as ‘witty and audacious’. A play of 1926, *Rails* (an ‘industrial melodrama’) featured music for ensemble by Vladimir Deshevov (1889-1955), a composer who was much involved with both theatre and music education in the 1920s. Only one extract from the music for this play seems to have survived, in the form of a piano piece itself entitled *Rails*: an effective musical depiction rather in the manner of a toccata, and perhaps somewhat reminiscent of Prokofiev (who was a near contemporary of Deshevov’s at the St Petersburg Conservatoire and studied under the same piano teacher; Deshevov’s piano *Meditations*, Op.3, of 1920-22 may also call Prokofiev to mind).

Of course, these various manifestations of modernity, with their machines and railways, had counterparts in the West, Honegger’s *Pacific 231* and Antheil’s *Ballet*

mécanique being obvious examples; likewise, Mosolov was not the only composer to set newspaper items to music: the German communist composer Hanns Eisler did something similar in his more or less contemporaneous *Zeitungsausschnitte*, Op.11.

American popular music – songs and dances, ragtime, early jazz – was taken up by ‘serious’ composers not only in Western and Central Europe, but also in the USSR: Shostakovich’s *Jazz Suites* and his arrangement of ‘Tea for Two’ as ‘Tahiti Trot’ are well known. The substantial compositional output of Leonid Polovinkin (1894-1949) – secretary for some years of the ASM – includes various pieces reflecting the jazz craze, such as *Foxtrot* for piano of 1925 (which is perhaps more of a rag than a foxtrot – but accurate terminology was not a primary concern!).

For composers in the USSR, an unavoidable aspect of modern life was, of course, precisely that they were in the USSR, under a regime to which they felt more or less enthusiastic allegiance. They were expected, and often willing, to celebrate and commemorate its history, achievements and aspirations. So, for example, Shostakovich’s Second Symphony and Roslavets’s cantata *October* were composed for the tenth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. Roslavets, indeed, as a committed communist as well as a modernist, was composing works in the 1920s such as the *Hymn of the Soviet Militia*, *Poetry of the Working Professions*, and *Songs of the Year 1905*.

The question of what kind of music was appropriate for the building of the new society lay inescapably in the background to Soviet music in the 1920s. If on the one hand it could be argued that a revolutionary society called for revolutionary – i.e. avant-garde – music, on the other hand there were those who held that a workers’ and peasants’ state required music that was instantly comprehensible by the masses. Various ‘proletarian’ groups in the arts came together in 1917 to form the organisation Proletkult (*Proletarskaya kultura*, ‘proletarian culture’), whose aim was to promote artistic and cultural activities among the working class: ‘...the development of an independent proletarian spiritual culture, including all areas of the human spirit – science, art and everyday life.’ A leading figure was Alexander Bogdanov, Lunacharsky’s brother-in-law. It received funding from Narkompros, but its status as an influential autonomous body, independent of state control, became in due course unacceptable to the government. At Proletkult’s height, its Congress in October 1920, with over 300 local groups represented, was instructed by Lenin, in no uncertain terms, to reject ‘most emphatically...as theoretically wrong and practically harmful, all attempts to invent a special culture, all attempts to isolate itself in an exclusive organisation.’ All parts of Proletkult had an ‘absolute duty to regard themselves as being entirely auxiliary organs in the system of institutions of the People’s Commissariat of Education, and performing their duties under the general guidance of the Soviet government...as part of the duties of the proletarian dictatorship.’ (Quoted in Schwarz, *Music and Mu-*

sical Life in Soviet Russia, pp. 21-22.) Proletkult was in effect incorporated into Narkompros, though it was not formally dissolved until 1923. In that same year, however, a sort of successor in the field of music was established in the form of RAPM – *Rossiiskaya assotsiatsiya proletarskikh muzykantov*, Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians – which encouraged proletarian composers, the production of mass songs, marches, folk-song arrangements and the like, but also propagandised against ‘bourgeois’ and western influences, and particularly against the ASM, through its journal *Music and October*. It is sometimes said that the history of Soviet music during this period is essentially that of the struggle between the ASM and the RAPM. While there is some truth in this, it is perhaps an exaggeration. In any case, it is worth bearing in mind that neither organisation was entirely dominated by extremists. The ASM included ‘establishment’ figures like Myaskovsky, while professional composers such as Deshevov were associated with Proletkult and the RAPM (which themselves contained rival factions).

For some years the Communist Party tolerated ideological disagreements in music and the arts generally. In a resolution of 1925 the Central Committee declared: ‘The Party cannot grant a monopoly to any of these groups.’ By the end of the decade, however, the situation had changed. Stalin had achieved absolute domination, and embarked on a programme of rapid industrial development and agricultural collectivisation; the New Economic Policy came to an end, and the first Five-year Plan was promulgated in 1928. Dissent was not to be permitted; everything was to be subordinated to the aim of realising ‘socialism in one country’. The dismissal of Lunacharsky in 1929 was symptomatic for the future of the state-sponsored arts. In music, RAPM initially gained the upper hand over ASM; its championing of often rather simplistic music for ‘the people’ seemed in accordance with the priorities of the regime. But the organisation was felt to have become overbearing and unacceptably intolerant, and it was shut down in 1930. Single official unions for practitioners of each of the arts were set up in 1932, including the Union of Soviet Composers; they functioned as agents of control as well as support: membership was necessary for access to resources, benefits, publication and performance. And ‘socialist realism’ became the official aesthetic doctrine which must underlie all artistic endeavour. What followed is another story.

A programme of Russian music from the period discussed here – ‘Around 1917’ – will be performed at a Chamber Music Club concert on 26th January 2018. It will feature music by a number of the composers mentioned in this article, including Myaskovsky, Mosolov, Lourié and Deshevov.

Roger Beeson

SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

Bartlett, Rosamund, and Powell, Jonathan, 'Russian Federation' I, 4: 'The 20th Century', in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (2nd edition, London: Macmillan, 2001)

'G.F.', 'Music in "Red" Russia' [interview with Darius Milhaud], *Musical Times* No.1008, February 1927, pp.131-132.

Haas, David, *Leningrad's Modernists: Studies in Composition and Musical Thought, 1917-1932* (New York: Peter Lang, c.1998)

Loulié, Arthur (trans. S.W. Pring), 'The Russian School', *Musical Quarterly* Vol.18 No.4, October 1932, pp.519-529.

Roberts, Peter Deane, *Modernism in Russian Piano Music, 1910-1929: Scriabin, Prokofiev and Their Russian Contemporaries* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993). Chapter 1: 'Introduction and Historical Background'.

Sabaneev, Leonid (trans. S.W. Pring), 'Musical Tendencies in Contemporary Russia', *Musical Quarterly* Vol.16 No.4, October 1930, pp.469-481.

Schwarz, Boris, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia: 1917-1981* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983)

Sitsky, Larry, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900-1929* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994)

On summer, seasons, seas and sweet melancholy: exploring landscape in Swedish song

'Let Nature have you for a while!' wrote Edvard Grieg to Danish poet and fellow occasional mountain hiker Julius Drachmann in July 1892. 'Nature' referred to the well-being, freshness, and inspiration Grieg and his friends felt they acquired during hikes in the Norwegian mountains, in this case in the region of Norway's 'national' mountains, the Jotunheimen range. Drachmann had been expressing a sense of staidness and frustration, and Grieg suggested the best, if not only, antidote he knew.

The belief in the physically and psychologically beneficial properties Nature offered was widespread in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Scandinavia. So too were the national ideologies that revolved around this nature, as well as the many, recurring artistic engagements with nature.

Swedish art song, known in Swedish as *romanser*, is one of these categories and

experienced a 'golden age' in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, while being continuously explored in the twentieth. All of Sweden's most renowned early twentieth-century composers – like Stenhammar, Rangström, Alfvén – engaged with the genre alongside many other lesser-known composers. The resulting pool of these songs is consequently reasonably substantial – not all of these engage with nature, but a substantial majority do.

TO (THE) SEA

It is perhaps fair to assume, however, that the average reader has not come across a huge number of these songs. There are non-Scandinavian singers who schedule them occasionally and bravely take on the unknown language, and some listeners might have come across them through recordings by some of the internationally renowned Swedish singers: Ann-Sofie von Otter, Elisabeth Söderström, Jussi Björling, Nicolai Gedda, Håkan Hagegård, Ingvar Wixell etc. But they are still relatively unknown, and are not – yet – properly part of any mainstream repertoire.

One of those you might have heard is *Till havs*, or 'To the Sea', by Gustaf Nordqvist. This once got much airtime through being frequently used by Jussi Björling as an encore, and its memorable refrain – opening on an upward leap of a sixth – is familiar to most in Sweden. Somewhat ironically, it is however rather atypical as a Nordic landscape-related song. *Till havs* is vigorous, ferocious, expansive and most of all forward- and outward looking. It calls for action, to set sail, to brave storms and winds, to be strong and courageous and to explore the wide, unknown, enchanting world. In short, it imbues value onto the onwards and elsewhere, the energy required underlined in the whirling and driving accompaniment, and the daring expressed in the ever-higher upward vocal leaps and harmonic tension on 'storms'.

None of these sentiments can be said to be common occurrences in Swedish art songs. As an on-line review of one of Ann-Sofie von Otter's discs of Swedish songs summarises it: 'the various atmospheres are variations on the same abstract mood; a Northern-tinged, nostalgic, colourful and slightly distanced temper with scents of spring flowers, rustles of the brook running in misty meadows, pond-ripples, gently rolling waves, longing and half-lights.' These are moods of reflection, of contemplation, dreaming, longing and wistfulness, rather than of action. But *Till havs* does represent one core aspect in the relationship between landscape and Swedish song: that of the physical, tangible nearness of the landscape. The author Jonatan Reuter (1859-1947), whose text Nordqvist (and others, including Sibelius) set, lived in Ekenäs, near the Finnish capital Helsinki, and very near the sea. An engineer by trade, when he turned to writing, all of his output seems to have been inspired by life in the southern Finnish archipelago and the ever-present life-giver, and life-taker, the sea, which would have dominated life in the community

throughout history. In Nordqvist's setting of *Till havs* we might hear an attempt to bring some of those tangible, concrete aspects of that sea to the fore.

In Jussi Björling's case, the recurrence of this song was to some extent also seen as an expression of his own close connection with the water, his free time by preference being spent in or near the Stockholm archipelago. This kind of mapping of everyday activity onto the ephemeral artistic expressions has a tendency to be more prevalent when landscapes are involved. But landscape can neither be concretely captured, nor easily explained, it can only be interpreted and recreated. So here we stumble on what we might call our inherent ambivalence to our relationship with landscapes: are we *in* them – walking through them, building on them, excavating them, preserving them, living from them – or are we looking *at* them – describing them, painting them, photographing them, re-imagining them? In Reuter's engagement with the sea we might detect a duality of these two approaches: both trying to describe it and interacting closely with it, being both near it and yet separate from it. Many of the landscape songs encompass the same duality, but, as I will attempt to demonstrate here, the engagement with the landscape in these songs goes beyond this strict dichotomy and involves more complex relationships.

POETIC LANDSCAPES

One specific reason for the flourishing of Swedish art song in the late nineteenth century was the production of a particularly great quantity of (new) domestic poetry from the 1890s and onwards. In previous decades, Danish and Norwegian, as well as German texts had dominated in Swedish song production. But with the development that Swedish literature underwent in the last decade of the century, more poetry worth capturing and interpreting in song also inspired the development of the *romanser*.

The relationship with nature these songs express and explore starts therefore with the poetry, while the poetry itself reveals and engages with particular approaches, ideologies and traditions prevalent in the surrounding culture. Swedish landscape songs are not just, or to some extent at all, *about* the landscape itself. We could perhaps suggest that they are 'poeticising' the landscape, part romanticising it to create mood and part exploiting it for metaphors. But I think we still miss several layers and a myriad of nuances if we simplify our understanding thus. For late nineteenth-century Sweden, the 'landscape' – the territory and its resources – was what stood between the country's existence and its extinction, between its potential inability to feed its inhabitants and its prosperity. The landscape is therefore tinged with a dependency: a need to coexist, to glorify protectively with one hand, while exploiting it with the other. This is a development beyond regarding nature as something aesthetic or mythical (or both), this is a relationship to the landscape

which is highly complex in its seeming straightforwardness: regarding it as the life source for both practical and poetic survival, or taming it and overcoming it while praising it as of the uttermost and unsurpassed beauty.

This conflict is perhaps not directly played out in the landscape songs or texts but it informs the attitude to the landscape, and sets it apart from cultures with a lesser dependency on the landscape to serve both practical and poetic functions. You might of course argue that we are *all* descended from agrarians, so we are all somewhere intuitively wired to understand the conditions of living off the landscape and living with the changing seasons. And understanding the aesthetic, poetic and metaphorical use nature can be put to is a highly communal, not to say universal, trait. While this is undoubtedly true, a universal concept can still be practiced in individual versions. Much as all cheeses are not cheddars. Both how you put the various ingredients together, where you draw them from and which parts you use, as well as how you consume them (or for that matter label them), creates individual results and individual practices.

Sweden today still has a tendency to think of itself as particularly closely connected with nature, and with a deeper need for that connection. It is mostly unclear, or at least un-reflected upon, wherein this connection lies and quite what it means. But the awareness of a perceived connection might also perpetuate it. Thus competitions of the Swedes' favourite word might crown 'summer field' or 'evening sky' the winners, the 'Nordic' style of design might favour clean lines, naturalness, wood and light, and while taking the shoes off indoors in winter and outdoors in summer goes right back to muddy farming and careful husbandry with scarce resources, it is today still a marker both of a demarcation of the separation of nature and civilisation (the outdoor-indoor divide), and an ongoing desire to continually re-establish the connection between them by physical activity (bare feet in fresh grass, outdoor eating in summer).

It is also true – gloriously so – that nature imposes its own conditions on us. A northern climate simply necessitates different practicalities than a southern one, and if you spent several months a year gazing at a sunless, ink-black sky – spectacular though it can be – you too would probably worship the summer when it comes, and make the best possible use of it while it lasts. Particularly if that sun now never seems to set, and makes up for its previous absence by keeping you company even when you are trying to sleep.

In this context, it is not especially surprising that the three discs of Swedish song Ann-Sofie von Otter has so far brought out are called 'Wings in the Night', 'Watercolour', and most recently, 'A Summer's Day: Swedish Romantic Songs'. The cycle of the day, the natural life, the landscape and the seasons are not just continuously present in the artistic and philosophical endeavour that art, poetry and music are engaged with, but are also essential tools for exploring and understanding ourselves, our lives, and others.

LANDSCAPE AND EXPERIENCE

The poetry that developed and flourished in Sweden around the 1890s gave composers access to texts of greater depth and perspective than before, written in more refined forms. The nature-lyricism became more concrete, with more connections between outer symbols and inner emotions, and with an emphasis on the *experience* gained in the landscape. This experience could be personal, general or historical, and it could affect mood, actions or the place itself. It relates to the idea that we need to see landscape(s) not as 'an object to be seen or a text to be read, but a process by which social and subjective identities are formed'. Thinking of landscapes as part of various processes is helpful as it enables us to step out of the 'inside-or-outside' categorisation, and brings to the focus an interaction between nature, us, and our narratives around the landscape. And it is through linking the 'experience' with the 'narrative' that we can understand the relationship between landscape and the Swedish landscape songs.

One kind of 'experience' might be a historical one – referring to connections with traditions and traditional interactions with the landscape. 'Flickan knyter i Johannennatten' by Johan Ludvig Runeberg (set by several composers), for example, refers to Midsummer's Eve and describes traditional – superstitious – rituals that flower-picking young girls would perform to try and read their future during this magical night. Another kind of 'historical' experience might include recounting labouring on the land, or more commonly, the deserved relaxation with dance, music and drink afterwards, the musical language in the settings of such texts helping to evoke the imagined activity.

In the historical experience we could also include those that engage with folklore and mythological traditions, virtually all of which are bound up with, and exist in, nature. Swedish folklore contains not only trolls, but a plenitude of various creatures that live in hollows, under trees, in streams. Or appear on misty clearings in dusky summer nights – dancing enticingly and dangerously. A very good example of how local beliefs and behaviour are evoked and explored to create new interpretations is Wilhelm Peterson-Berger's setting of Gustaf Fröding's poem *Titania*. Fröding (1860-1911) is one of the poets whose work is recurringly set, possibly not least because of his incredibly rhythmical and melodic poetry. Light, fresh and full of word play, it seems to be driven by its own inherent rhythms and an 'almost orchestral sound-world'. Fröding studied both German and English poetry closely, and also worked extensively on translations of works by Byron, Burns, Shelley, Poe and others. In his translations, he seems to strive to keep the original tone as well as the meaning, but at the same time find poetic and rhythmical equivalents in the new language. At times his translations can be regarded as more akin to 'reinterpretations' than transcriptions. The same fate has befallen Shakespeare's *Titania* here. Fröding transfers her to a Swedish forest where she becomes an 'älva' or a 'skogsrå' (a kind of wood nymph), dancing at midnight or

at dawn – tantalising, fascinating and frightening. The text describes a sound ‘as if from small violins’ which is heard finding its way through hazel and birch, a dark forest, and a moon shining on the fields. But look, who is dancing there? It is, it is, it is – Titania!

It is Fröding’s inherent ‘sound-world’ that Peterson-Berger explores in his setting, using a simple vocal line which allows the narrative lyrics to drive it forward, and employing a supporting accompaniment which colours the lightness and dances with the voice, faster and faster, to the discovery of Titania’s ‘wind-light, moon-silvery’ midsummer night ball. But Peterson-Berger also removes Titania one step further into a local setting by letting his piano accompaniment in the opening passages imitate a fiddle with open fifths and end-ornament resembling the style of rustic dances. Fröding’s re-localised Titania has made a Swedish peasant version of her: an ancient mythical spirit which is part of an ongoing local engagement with nature and the landscape as a culturally significant and collectively derived place. Peterson-Berger’s setting further emphasises its local relevance through its aurally created landscape and the rustic ‘violin’ accompaniment. In a further twist to the re-narration, Peterson-Berger’s linking of Titania and the violin gives her yet one more connection with nature: the violin is in Swedish folklore also closely linked with the figure of ‘Näcken’ – a sprite who appears (naked, no less) in streams, sitting on rocks and playing his violin to lure folks in with him. Titania is by now firmly transferred away from any Shakespearian forest and into the deep forests of the Värmland region, and the song reimagines not only her character in a different forest clearing, but also our connection with the narratives around the Swedish landscape.

Another kind of experience of a landscape might be spiritual or emotional. A summer’s day might bring joy of the moment and bright hopes for the future, a winter’s day would be dead and cold. Winter is, however, almost never contemplated in Swedish songs. It may very occasionally occur as a contrast, but virtually never in its own right. Winter, it seems, is too opposing a force for everything that Swedish poetry holds dear – rejuvenation, softness, light, the feel of the landscape – and it is therefore avoided. There is no poetry in winter, only survival, and it is almost entirely absent in the oeuvre.

In *Skogen sover* (The forest sleeps) by Ernest Thiel and its setting by Hugo Alfvén, it is instead summer, and the soft stillness of a June night is evoked in the gentle ripples in the piano, over which a long, shimmering vocal line emerges. In small harmonic shifts it describes the faint ray of sun which lingers in the night sky – the ‘day keeping watch in the night’. In minute shades of increased animation it considers the silence after ‘her gay laughs’, as she has now fallen asleep. Mute the narrator sits by her side, while love keeps watch over its treasure in the June night. The repeated phrases of ‘love keeps watch’, and the melisma on ‘June’ betrays the song’s aching heart: ‘she’ is no longer the night but someone else, and nothing is

more precious in that moment than to sit by her in this soft, gentle, light night, while she sleeps.

Alfvén as a composer is particularly sensitive to the Swedish landscape, and often takes it as a starting point for artistic exploration. His most often played piece in Britain is his 'Swedish Rhapsody', or 'Midsummer Night's Wake' to translate its original title, in which he fuses and develops a range of folk tunes to evoke the gaiety, festivity and sensuality celebrated during the longest, lightest summer nights of the year. In contrast to this very outward expression, *Skogen sover* is turned inward, toward exquisitely carved stillness, contemplation and wonder. The gentleness of the June evenings in this northern land infuses the tender harmonic shifts, and the stillness of the night is paralleled in the way the voice seems to float above the accompaniment, almost high enough to be out of reach or touch – capturing one single perfect moment with extraordinary tenderness.

A slightly more complex use of both the narrative and seasonal experience of landscape can be found in Bo Bergman's poem and Wilhelm Stenhammar's setting of *Jungfru Blond och Jungfru Brunett* (Maiden Blond and Maiden Brunett). The use of 'maiden' in the title already places the text in an older, rustic tradition, as does their clothing (long skirts), their countenance (pigtailed swinging) and their activity (an impromptu outdoor dance). The air is 'autumn clear' and light, light, light – light as the maidens' dancing joy in the late summer sunshine. But across the yellowing field the universe is cold, and trees and hedges stand naked. Why, asks the song, are you dancing, when stars are falling and night is approaching? This scares the girls, and they run back home as the last rays of sun set, now frightened of the wind whining and laughing as it stealthily chases them home. They manage to get there, but outside the darkness, 'like a troll', promises to catch them next time.

The narrative drive, the mood changes and the seasonal references are well captured in Stenhammar's setting. The consistent 2/4 is made into a swinging, dance-like passage in the opening, which gives way to static, waiting chords and a slow, melancholic vocal line describing the surroundings and approaching coldness (with a falling star even picked out in the piano). The threatening mood is built up gradually and with increasing volume until both the maidens and the music stop in terror. When they continue, the laughing wind and pursuing darkness are expressed in the accompaniment which chases the girls until they reach the home fire and mother. The final section is subdued as well as unsettled and uncertain under the apparent safety of home: the threat of the darkness and the future in which the mother cannot keep them safe present to the end.

This expressive setting successfully engages with the text's reference to the landscape as both real – as a narrative space and a place in time – and metaphorical – the changing conditions of the seasons, and the anthropomorphised natural elements. The main theme of the song is reminiscent of the use of the landscape in

a short story by Nobel Prize winning author Pär Lagerkvist. In 'Far och jag' (Father and I), a son and his father, who works at the railway, walk across fields and through a forest for a Sunday outing and a brief visit to relatives. On the way out nature is singing at them: it teams, hops, breathes, smells, chatters – in short, it is an expansive bodily and sensual immersion. On the way home however, the sun disappears, the shadows crowd in, and everything is silent. Then out of nowhere comes a train, unscheduled and with a driver the boy's father does not recognise. This scares the boy, and from then on he realises that he is alone, and that nothing can be trusted. The parallel with Stenhammar's song as a kind of coming-of-age ritual, or a more general comment on change and uncertainty as life evolves, might not in itself be uncommon, but these texts also highlight a very specific narrative use of the landscape. Here it is not merely part of a staging or a back-drop, but a character in its own right: one which might take part in, and ultimately affect the outcome of, the story.

Pär Lagerkvist is also the author of the poem in my final song example. *Det är vackrast när det skymmer* (It is most beautiful at dusk) is a poem which very gently explores the infinity of existence, and our limited space within it.

At dusk, all the love of heaven gathers in a dimmed light,
over the earth, over all its houses.
Everything is tenderness, everything caressed,
The Lord himself reduces distant shores.
Everything is near, everything is far,
everything given us as a loan.
Everything is mine, and everything will be taken away from me, –
Soon everything will be taken away from me,
the trees, the clouds, the ground on which I walk.
Alone, leaving no trace, I shall go.

Author's translation

Here is the landscape as the basis for all our existence, but also for all our emotional spirituality. 'Dusk' is one of those words Swedes are apparently very fond of, and its gentle light bathes this most difficult of subject matters in a tender warmth. We are here both completely at one with the landscape, impossible to divide from, yet separate as we must walk on while it stays. Gunnar de Frumerie's setting achieves and enhances this sense of both infinity and closeness, of vast conundrums made hand-sized and resting in our palms. Its simple, steadfast rhythmic patterns both secure us and allow suggestions of perpetuated repetitions, and although its leading downward phrases in the vocal line echo the melancholy of 'dusk', they often land on the tonic and thereby imbue the sense of reaching safe anchorage or a homecoming rather than any kind of sadness or loss. And while the song harmonically explores both the intense beauty of life as well as the inescapable losses, recognising their emotional power and potential to hurt, it never

lets either of these take over. The musical interpretation of the poem remains earthbound, and landscape here is our safest and most true core and the essence of our gravity: the place from whence we came and to which we return.

SOUL AND LANDSCAPE

The landscape connections in these songs are then both concrete and ethereal, both of events, places and narratives, as well as of moods, atmospheres and philosophical metaphors. The songs listen to the wind, and sit still in moonlight. They walk along shores, and run through fields. They challenge fears in the forest, and contemplate distance and movement beside the sea. They phrase and rephrase the beauty of spring, evening, trees, and they deposit memories in the stones, the soil and the stars. They turn with the seasons, and they grow with the days' cycles. For these songs, landscape is everything: the source of life, and the condition of living.

'Scandinavian art songs are a unique expression of the cultures of Sweden, Norway and Denmark', write the publishers of Anna Hersey's guide to singing Scandinavian song. 'Common themes found in art and literature,' they suggest, 'include a love of nature, feelings of longing and melancholy, the contrast between light and dark, the extremes of the northern climate, and lively folk traditions.' While such generic statements threaten to simplify these relationships to the point of unhelpfulness, they speak also of a preoccupation so permeating it is impossible to miss. A recent CD of Swedish song by soprano Miah Persson bears the title *Soul and Landscape*, named after one of the songs on the disc by Gösta Nystroem, and Persson's CD also has as its cover a painting by Richard Bergh, 'Nordic Summer Evening' (1899-1900). It features a turn-of-the-century man and woman on a balcony overlooking a lake. The far shore is covered in trees, trees also grow near the veranda. The man and woman highlight the boundary between indoors and outdoors, the separation but also the connection between them and the landscape. Both their inclusion and their stance – they gaze passively at the scene rather than interact with it – are typical traits which represent the constantly negotiated relationship between us and the landscape, and point to the questions we asked at the beginning of how we think of or relate to 'landscape'. Landscape here is poetically beautiful but set slightly apart, near us, yet still ungraspable. The painting also appears on the cover of the recently published *Romanser: 25 Swedish Songs*, which aims to promote Swedish songs outside Sweden, thus illustrating further its frequent (possibly too frequent) use for expressing generally perceived core ideas around the Swedes and their landscape. Gently shimmering lights, still waters, dark firs, and people perpetually exploring their own relationship with this tangible, sensual and ever-present landscape: here are your Swedish landscape songs.

Annika Lindskog

EXPLORE FURTHER

CMC concert on 15 November: 'Landscape and music: focus on Swedish song'. Also look out for further recitals later in the year in connection with a SWEA scholarship project – more information via CMC mailing list.

STUDY/SING

Roland-Silverstein, K. (ed.), *Romanser: 25 Swedish songs with guide to Swedish lyric diction* (Stockholm: Gehrmans Musikförlag, 2013).

Svenska romanser (Stockholm: Gehrmans Musikförlag, 2014). A selection of 116 songs, in Swedish only. A great selection and resource. Both can easily be ordered at www.gehrmans.se .

Hersey, Anna, *Scandinavian song: a guide to Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish repertoire and diction* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

LISTEN

Wings in the Night. Ann-Sofie von Otter and Bengt Forsberg. Deutsche Grammophon, 1996.

Soul and Landscape. Miah Persson and Roger Vignoles. Hyperion, 2001.

Wilhelm Stenhammar: Songs. Peter Mattei and Bengt-Åke Lundin. BIS, 1994.

Till havs. Jussi Björling. SCD 1100, released 1999 (various recording dates).