

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH CONCERT SERIES AUTUMN · WINTER 2011

Concerts at The University

Tuesday 25 October 2011

1.10pm

Reid Concert Hall

Monica McGhee · soprano

James Geer · tenor

Ronald Woodley · piano

Programme of works by DUPARC



The Songs of Henri Duparc (1848-1933)

The seventeen songs that make up almost all of Duparc's surviving output were composed relatively early in his life, between the late 1860s and early 1880s, though the composer spent a further, unproductive half-century in what we would probably today term a state of depressive illness, mostly lying on a couch at home, gradually losing his sight and mobility, and developing an intense, personal religiosity away from the world of composition, before his death as late as 1933. The ten *mélodies* performed this afternoon include some rarely heard youthful works, including the only surviving duet, *La fuite*, which the composer rejected for inclusion in his main 'complete' edition of 1911, but all of which certainly deserve an occasional outing. Stylistically, Duparc sits in a set of musical relationships that link not only with his obvious French compatriots such as Berlioz, Gounod, Fauré and forward to Debussy, but also with the more Germanic strand of Wagner, Franck, and in some of the earliest songs (for example the *Romance de Mignon*) back to the Lieder of Schubert and Schumann. Across this spectrum there is a remarkably wide expressive range, and in our programme we have in places deliberately juxtaposed the simple with the complex, the serene with the melodramatic, the darkly introspective with the flamboyantly extrovert. Throughout his songs, as the French writer on Duparc, Rémy Stricker, has put it, 'he focused on the inaccessible dream in which is mingled desire and pain ... Re-read each poem that inspired him, and you will find there the obsessive themes: elsewhere, absence, expectation. When he encountered Baudelaire's 'La vie antérieure', he must have found this trilogy brought to such a high point of concentration that all seemed to have been said, once and for all. It is easy for us to understand that all the rest is silence....'

Today's recital – ending with *La vie antérieure* forms part of our project to perform the complete songs of Duparc in versions for high voice, thus returning a number of these works, which are more often heard today in versions for baritone or lower female voices, to a form closer to Duparc's original conceptions. In a few cases, such as *Testament* and *La vague et la cloche*, which were indeed first written for lower voices, we hope to bring a new, more vibrant dimension to these intense, at times even harrowing, masterpieces of the nineteenth-century French song repertory.

The recital will be presented in two groups of five songs, separated by a short break.

1. *Élégie (Elegy)* (after Thomas Moore)

Oh! Whisper not his name! Let it sleep in the shadow, where cold and unhonoured his remains are laid to rest. Mute, mournful and chill our tears fall, like the night-time dew which moistens the grass above his head. But the night-time dew, though it weeps in silence, shall beglitter the green above his resting-place; and our tears, shed in secret, shall keep his memory fresh and green in our hearts.

2. *La vague et la cloche (The Wave and the Bell)* (François Coppée)

Once, overwhelmed by a powerful potion, I dreamed that amidst the waves and the noise of the sea I was sailing, without lantern, in the night, wretched oarsman beyond hope of reaching shore... The ocean spat its slobber in my face, and the atrocious wind froze me to the marrow; the waves crashed about me like falling masonry, in that slow rhythm, broken by a sudden silence... Then, it all changed... the sea and its dark maelstrom were stilled... beneath my feet the boat-deck gave away... and I was alone in an old bell-tower, furiously astride a clanging bell. I clung obstinately to the ear-splitting thing, convulsed and eyes shut with the exertion; the booming made the old stones shake, so hard was I urging on the heavy swings. Why, O dream, did you not tell me where God is leading us? Why did you not tell me whether it will ever end, this pointless labour and this unending racket, which is, alas, the condition of human life?

3. *Chanson triste (Song of Sadness)* (Jean Lahor)

In your heart sleeps a ray of moonlight, a sweet summer moonlight; and to flee the harassments of life, I shall drown myself in your brightness. I shall forget past sorrows, my love, when you cradle my sad heart and my thoughts in the loving calm of your arms! You will take my ailing head, oh, sometimes on to your knees, and recite to it a ballad, which will seem to speak of us. And from your eyes full of such sadnesses, from your eyes then shall I drink so many kisses, so many tendernesses, that perhaps I shall be healed...

4. **Au pays où se fait la guerre (*To the land at war*) (Théophile Gautier)**

To the land at war my lover has gone; it seems to my desolate heart that I alone remain on earth. As he left with a parting kiss, he took my soul from my mouth... O God, what keeps him so long? Look, the sun is setting, and I, all alone in my tower, still await his return. Pigeons are cooing on the rooftop, cooing their love with their sad, enchanting sound; the water ripples under the tall willows. I feel on the edge of tears, my heart overflows like an open lily, and I no longer dare to hope. Look, the white moon is shining, and I, all alone in my tower, still await his return. Someone strides up the stairs... Is it he, my darling? It is not he, but just my little page-boy with my lamp... Evening winds, fly, tell him he is all my thoughts and my dreams, all my joy and my heartache! Look, the dawn is breaking, and I, all alone in my tower, still await his return.

5. **Duet: La fuite (*The Escape*) (Théophile Gautier)**

Kadidja: In the starless firmament the moon extinguishes its rays, night lends us its veil. Let us away, away! Ahmed: Do you not fear the anger of your insolent brothers, your father's despair, your father with his white eyebrows? Kadidja: What do I care about scorn, blame, risks, curses? It is in you that my soul lives. Let us away, away! Ahmed: Courage fails me, I tremble, and through my breast I seem to feel the icy touch of their dagger... Kadidja: Born in the desert, my steed would fly across the wheatfields, along the furrows, rival to the winds. Let us away, away! Ahmed: To the uncrossable desert, no parasol to throw a little shade on the sand, no tent to give me shelter... Kadidja: My eyelashes shall bring you shade, and at night we shall sleep under the dark tent of my hair. Let us away, away! Ahmed: If the illusory mirage hid the true path from us, without food, or water to drink, we would both die tomorrow... Kadidja: My heart gives way in happiness; if there is no water at our stops, then drink the tears of my joy. Let us away, away! Both: In the starless firmament the moon extinguishes its rays / My eyelashes shall bring you shade / night lends us its veil / and at night shall we sleep under the dark tent of my hair / Let us away, away!

(Short break)

6. **Phidylé (Charles-Marie-René Leconte de Lisle)**

The grass is soft for sleep beneath the cool poplars, on the slopes with their mossy springs, which, in the flowering meadows, bubbling up from myriad sources, vanish once more beneath the dark thickets. Rest, Phidylé! Midday blazes down on the greenery, and invites you to slumber. Amid the clover and thyme, alone, in the full sunlight, the bees buzz to and fro; a warm scent wafts where the paths bend; the red flower in the cornfields nods, and the birds, skimming the hill with their wing, seek the shade of the wild roses. Rest, Phidylé! But when the orb of the sun, sinking on its dazzling arc, sees its heat subside, may your loveliest smile and your sweetest kiss reward me for my wait!

7. **Lamento (*Lament*) (Théophile Gautier)**

Do you know the white tomb, over which there sways with plaintive call the shadow of a yew? On the yew a pale dove, sad and alone in the setting sun, sings its call. It is as though the awakened soul is weeping beneath the earth in unison with the song, and coos its lament, so gently, at the misfortune of one forgotten. Ah! nevermore near the tomb shall I go, when evening descends in its dark mantle, to hear the pale dove singing, on the branch of the yew, its plaintive song!

8. **Romance de Mignon (*Mignon's Romance*) (Victor Wilder, after Goethe)**

Do you know it, that radiant land where golden fruits glisten in the branches? A sweet breeze fragrances the air, and the laurel entwines with the green myrtle. Do you know it, do you know it? Yonder, yonder, my beloved, let us hasten our steps, yonder, yonder! Do you know it, that wonderful dwelling-place where all still speaks to me of our love? Where every single thing says to me in sorrow: 'Who has robbed you of your joy and your happiness?' Do you know it, do you know it? Yonder, yonder, my beloved, let us hasten our steps, yonder, yonder.

9. **Testament (*Testament*)**(Armand Silvestre)

For the wind to bring them to you on the black wing of remorse, I shall write on the dead leaf the torments of my dead heart! All my sap has been dried up in the bright noon-days of your beauty, and, like the dead leaf, nothing living remains for me. Your eyes have burned me to my soul, like pitiless suns! Leaf reclaimed by the abyss, the south wind is about to carry me away also... But before then, for it to bring them to you on the black wing of remorse, I shall write on the dead leaf the torments of my dead heart!

10. **La vie antérieure (*Earlier Life*)**(Charles Baudelaire)

Long did I dwell beneath vast colonnades, dyed a thousand hues by the burning sea-suns, and whose tall columns, erect and majestic, at evening made them seem like grottoes of basalt. The surging billows, rolling reflections of the skies, would blend in solemn and mystic ways the almighty chords of their rich music with the colours of the setting sun mirrored in my eyes. It is there that I lived a life of serene pleasures, amid the azure, the waves, the radiance; and the naked slaves, saturated in scent, who would cool my brow with palm-fronds, and whose sole care was to deepen the painful secret that filled me with yearning languor.

Scottish soprano **Monica McGhee** is currently in her second year of the Masters in Vocal Performance course at the Royal College of Music as an Opperby Stokowski Scholar. She is supported by a Henry Wood Trust Award, an Ian Fleming Award administered by the Musicians' Benevolent Fund and a Simon Fletcher Charitable Trust award. While an undergraduate at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama she enjoyed numerous competition and operatic successes: in 2008 she won the Jean Highgate Scholarship award for undergraduate singing, and second place in the Hugh S. Robertson Scots Song prize in 2009. Operatic engagements have included the role of Gherardino in the RSAMD 2007 production of Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, Soeur Charles in the 2008 production of Poulenc's *Les Dialogues des Carmélites*, and she created the role of Else in the 2010 world premiere of Rory Boyle's *Kasper Hauser*. In April 2010 she joined the Grange Park Opera chorus in their productions of Prokofiev's *Love of Three Oranges* and Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. In the autumn of 2010 she covered the role of Frasquita in Scottish Opera's production of *Carmen*, and performed Gretel with Bloomsbury Opera. Monica's oratorio engagements have included Rossini's *Petite Messe*

Solennelle with the Shetland Choral Society, Vivaldi's *Gloria* with the Milngavie Choral Society, the soprano soloist in the Bach *Magnificat* with the RCM Baroque Orchestra, and Elgar's *The Kingdom* with the Abingdon Choral Society. More recently she has performed the role of Giannetta for Haddo House Opera in their production of Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'amore*, and in the summer of 2011 she was a finalist in the prestigious Les Azuriales Opera Competition in the south of France. Her studies are generously supported by the Robertson Trust and the Cross Trust.

Hailing from Sussex, **James Geer** studied at Magdalen College, Oxford, Trinity College of Music and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama. He is a Britten-Pears Alumnus and a Samling Scholar. Over the past year James has worked with Music Theatre Wales in Philip Glass's *The Penal Colony*, Glyndebourne Festival (Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*), Glyndebourne on Tour (Monteverdi's *Il Coronazione di Poppea*) and Bampton Classical Opera (Handel's *The Choice of Hercules*). He has been a soloist with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales under Nicholas Kraemer (Handel's *Saul*) and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra (Britten's *Saint Nicolas*). Other solo roles have included Male Chorus (Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*), Don Ottavio (Mozart's *Don Giovanni*), Grimoaldo (Handel's *Rodelinda*), Gonzalves (Ravel's *L'Heure espagnole*), Acis (Handel's *Acis and Galatea*), Frederic (*The Pirates of Penzance*) and Monsieur Triquet (Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*). He has performed recently as a soloist at Wigmore Hall (Bach cantatas with The Academy of Ancient Music and Richard Egarr, and in the Samling Showcase with Malcolm Martineau), the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Worcester Cathedral (Three Choirs Festival, in Beethoven's Mass in C), and the Cadogan Hall (*My Fair Lady*). This year he will have performed Handel's *Messiah* with The Philharmonia Orchestra and the London Handel Players, as well as with the London Chamber Choir and Gloucester Choral Society. Other oratorios include Haydn's *The Creation* (Aberystwyth), Mendelssohn's *Elijah* (Snape Maltings) and Handel's *Israel in Egypt* (Nottingham). Concert engagements have included solo roles in Poulenc's *Les Dialogues des Carmélites* with the RSNO; Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* with Nicholas McGegan and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, both at the Edinburgh International Festival; and *Messiah* at the Royal Albert Hall with Sir David Willcocks. In the spring of 2011 his debut recording, of Britten's *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente* with Malcolm Martineau, was released on the Onyx label.

Ronald Woodley enjoys a wide-ranging career as musicologist and performer. He joined the Research Department of the Birmingham Conservatoire as Professor of Music in 2004; previously he held positions as Head of Postgraduate Studies & Research at the RNCM in Manchester, and before that lecturing posts at the Universities of Lancaster, Newcastle, Liverpool, and Christ Church, Oxford.

As a performer he trained principally as clarinettist at the RNCM before completing a doctorate in musicology at Keble College, Oxford. He has commissioned or been the dedicatee of a number of new works, including an exciting series of bass clarinet duos in the 1990s, performed in partnership with Roger Heaton. Earlier in his career, Ron was invited by Colin Lawson and The Parley of Instruments to make the first broadcast performances for Radio 3 of works by Telemann for two chalumeaux, a broadcast which in many ways jump-started interest in the early clarinet in the UK. As a musicologist he has an international reputation as a specialist in late medieval and early Renaissance music theory, and is currently working on a three-year project on the fifteenth-century musician Johannes Tinctoris, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Other projects in nineteenth- and twentieth-century musicology, with a focus on performance studies, have included work on Ravel, Prokofiev, Steve Reich, and, most recently, early recordings of Lieder and of pianists in the circles of Brahms and Clara Schumann, especially Ilona Eibenschütz. When not doing any of the above, he is increasingly drawn to the piano, mainly now in chamber music and song repertoires with James Geer, but previously also in a successful two-piano partnership with the London-based pianist Andrew West.

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FORTHCOMING CONCERTS:

Friday 28 October, 1.10pm

St. Cecilia's Hall, Niddry Street

Graham O'Sullivan · flute

Chie Hirai · fortepiano

MOZART Sonata in C major for flute and piano KV14

MOZART Fantasia in C minor, KV475

HAYDN Trio in G major Hob XV:15

ADMISSION FREE

Sunday 30 October, 11.30am

St. Giles' Cathedral

Academic service

Edinburgh University Chamber Choir

Eric von Ibler · artistic director

St. Giles' Cathedral Choir

Napier University Chamber Choir

Michael Harris · conductor

ADMISSION FREE