

Soirées Musicales Quintette

presents

Soirées Musicales and more

St Mary's Anglican Church

Main Street Kangaroo Point

4pm Sunday 20 September 2020

Annie Lower – soprano Rachael Griffin – soprano

Mattias Lower – tenor Leon Warnock – baritone

Peter Roennfeldt – piano



Program

Selections from *Sei quartetti* (1821) to texts by Metastasio

Del sen gl'adori (I do not boast of love)

Se un core annodi (If a heart binds)

Franz Ignaz Danzi (1763-1826)

Soirées musicales (1835) to texts by Pietro Metastasio and Carlo Pepoli

La promessa (The promise) - canzonetta

L'invito (The invitation) – bolero

La serenata (The serenade) – nocturno for soprano and tenor

L'orgia (The revel) – arietta

La danza (The dance) – tarantella napoletana

Gioacchino Rossini (1792-1868)

Dichterliebe (Poet's love) Op.48 (1840) to texts by Heinrich Heine

1. Im wunderschönen Monat Mai (In the lovely month of May)
2. Aus meinen Tränen spriessen (From my tears spring up)
3. Die Rose, die Lilie, die Taube, die Sonne (The rose, the lily, the dove, the sun)
4. Wenn ich in deine Augen seh' (When I look into your eyes)
5. Ich will meine Seele tauchen (I will immerse my soul)
6. Im Rhein, im schönen Strome (The Rhine, the beautiful river)
7. Ich grolle nicht (I bear no grudge)
8. Und wüssten's die Blumen, die kleinen (And if the flowers knew, the little ones)
9. Das ist ein Flöten und Geigen (There is playing of flutes and fiddles)
10. Hör' ich das Liedchen klingen (When I heard the song)
11. Ein Jüngling liebt ein Mädchen (A boy loves a girl)
12. Am leuchtenden Sommermorgen (In the bright summer morning)
13. Ich hab' im Traum geweinet (I cried in my dream)
14. Allnächtlich im Traume seh' ich dich (Every night in my dreams I see you)
15. Aus alten Märchen (From the old fairy tales)
16. Die alten, bösen Lieder (The old evil songs)

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Soirées musicales

La pesca (The fishing trip) – nocturno for two sopranos

La partenza (The parting) – canzonetta

I marinai (The sailors) – duetto for tenor and baritone

La pastorella delle Alpi (The alpine shepherdess) – Tirolese

Il rimprovero (The reproach) – canzonetta

La gita in gondola (The gondola ride) – barcarola

La regatta veneziana (The Venetian regatta) – nocturno for two sopranos

Rossini

About the program

Our ensemble's name is inspired by the title chosen by some composers for music intended for performance in nineteenth-century salon concerts. The most notable **Soirées musicales** collection is by Rossini, composed in Paris in the 1830s after retiring from the world of opera. Having retired from the theatre at the height of his success, Rossini thereafter composed and performed in private settings. Despite the French title it is clearly an Italian anthology, full of the lyricism and brilliance that made his operas so popular. Nostalgia for his homeland, in particular Venice and Naples which each saw the première of ten of his operas, and regional nods to Spain and the Austrian Tyrol, also give this collection a mild cosmopolitan flavour.

The poets selected by Rossini were known for their operatic texts, but these songs and duets are mostly lyrical or reflective. Pietro Metastasio (1698-1782) was the most popular opera librettist during the eighteenth century, but this had waned as Rossini appeared on the scene. Even so, his first opera *Demetrio e Polibio* was possibly fashioned after a Metastasio text. He also retained some loyalty to the famous writer, in the choice of three poems for the *Soirées musicales*. Another type of cultural allegiance informed Rossini's selection of Count Carlo Pepoli, also a resident of Paris from the 1830s. Pepoli (1796-1881) was by then a political exile, forced to abandon his Bolognese aristocratic heritage after siding with anti-Austrian revolutionaries. This political conflict no doubt informed his writing of the libretto of Bellini's opera *I Puritani*, which was first produced with great success in Paris in 1835, the same year Rossini's *Soirées musicales* was published. However, apart from a few moments of emotional tension, his poetry as seen in this collection is straightforward and uncomplicated.

Having previously performed selections of this wonderful anthology, we are delighted to present the entire collection today, quite possibly the first local performance of the complete set in a single concert. Furthermore, our aim to build innovative programs prompted the idea of ordering the items to develop a loose narrative, as well as variety between successive numbers. Our first bracket opens with a promise of undying love (*La promessa*) that is responded to by an alluring Spanish bolero (*L'invito*) with hints of guitars and castanets. After a competing love interest appears (*La serenata*), the disenchanted former lover departs, leaving the new couple to simply enjoy the good life (*L'orgia* and *La danza*).

The second Rossini bracket, after the Schumann cycle, is full of water imagery. A nocturnal duet (*La pesca*) introduces Nice, a fisherman, whose lover must now depart (*La partenza*). Then as a storm rages, two onlookers watch from the shore, (*I marinai*) the marine imagery being a metaphor for life's struggles. Before departing the young lover is again diverted, this time by the charms of a yodelling shepherdess (*La pastorella delle Alpi*), but before he can leave his erstwhile love interest reproves him for his disloyalty (*Il rimprovero*). The conflicted suitor provides a pragmatic solution in inviting both ladies on a boat ride (*La gita in gondola*), and then the entire company enjoys the excitement of a regatta (*La regatta veneziana*).

As a centrepiece interspersed between the two Rossini brackets is Schumann's **Dichterliebe**, one of the finest song cycles ever composed. In the poems by Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), inherently romantic nature imagery is juxtaposed with dark, bitter irony. This clearly gave the composer great scope to devise a work that scales both the heights and depths of human experience. However he chose to set just sixteen of the sixty-five texts published by Heine in 1823 as *Lyrisches Intermezzo*. Interestingly, the first four songs and also the finale of the cycle are found in the same position within Heine's publication, so both poet and composer clearly intended their respective collections as spanning a broad arc of emotion.

Commencing with a personification of spring's arrival in May as a symbol of new love, the cycle starts with a succession of unsullied images of innocent, but sincere, infatuation. However with the first mention of the Rhine (*Im Rhein*) a grander vista is summoned, particularly the soaring Cologne Cathedral. Dating from the Middle Ages it was not yet completed, but would soon reach its final form after construction recommenced in 1842. The Rhine has inspired many artists, and Heine himself would have known it well, as in 1819 he studied at Bonn University, possibly while these poems were in gestation. The cycle now transitions from intimacy to more powerful imagery. The turning point of the seventh song (*Ich grolle nicht*) epitomises the irony of our protagonist seeming outwardly confident, while inwardly experiencing heartbreak. The central group of songs dwell on conflicting emotions, even conjuring up the scene of a wedding party to which our poet is not invited, presumably the nuptials of his former lover. Perhaps as a ploy to trivialise his pain, a folksong-like ditty is sung, (*Ein Jüngling*) but this too has a stinging tail. Nature images recur, but veiled in dreams that are either comforting or disturbing. Another folksong-inspired song (*Aus alten Märgen*) provides fleeting nature allusions, only to be shattered by a haunting, powerful finale. Again using Rhineland imagery, the great pain requires a huge coffin, born out to sea by twelve giants.

Some songs in *Dichterliebe* are very brief and others are well developed, but all allow the text to speak directly free of artifice. With a consistently syllabic setting, and minimal repetition of words, Heine's poems are enhanced artistically, but stay intact as literature. It was the culmination of Schumann's 'Year of song' of 1840 when he produced over 150

Lieder, in response to being united in marriage to Clara Wieck after overcoming the major obstacle of her father's disapproval. The pain of separation is eloquently expressed at several points in this cycle, so it is tantalising to wonder if Schumann really believed in eternal love, which Heine often disavows. *Dichterliebe* should probably not be viewed as an autobiographical commentary, but Schumann's several youthful dalliances with unresponsive or unavailable lovers would have informed his approach to these texts. Furthermore, the piano parts most often reveal his truest thoughts, and sometimes they are self-contained, as the vocal line is mainly a vehicle for text delivery, as in *Das ist ein Flöten und Geigen*.

In similar vein to *Frauenliebe- und Leben*, the cycle which in contrast focusses on a woman's experience, *Dichterliebe* also concludes with a postlude that reprises an earlier song. In *Frauenliebe* the opening song recurs without voice, as a substitute for the ninth poem about old age and widowhood that Schumann chose not to set. In *Dichterliebe* he returns to the postlude of the twelfth song, which concludes with the text that quotes the flowers of summer: 'Don't be angry with our sister, you doleful, pale man'. Perhaps in this way, Schumann resolves all of the poet's dark pain, with quiet resignation.

We open the program with two of the **Sei quartetti** by Danzi, a German composer and cellist of Italian heritage whose circle of acquaintances included Mozart and Weber. Danzi was better known for his instrumental works but he composed in all genres. These vocal quartets appeared towards the end of a busy career that included working in several court opera orchestras, particularly in Mannheim and Munich. The texts are taken from the opera libretto *Achille in Sciro* by Metastasio, which was first used by Antonio Caldara for a production in Vienna in 1736. Danzi's settings however are not in operatic style, but their genesis rather coincidentally provides a link to our program today. They were published in Bonn in 1821, just a couple of years after Heine had lived there, so those both artists would have had firsthand experience of the Rhine. As already mentioned, the Rhine not only inspired Schumann in his setting of *Dichterliebe*, but also other works such as the *Rhenish* symphony which premiered in Dusseldorf, the Rhineland city where he and his family settled in 1850.

Another connection is that Heine spent the final decades of his life as a political exile in Paris, so was familiar with its salon culture and reported upon it as journalist for German newspapers. Heine implied in an 1837 article that Rossini wrote the perfect soundtrack to the superficiality of the Bourbon restoration. In his 'Florentine Nights' of 1836 he further refers to Rossini as the Swan of Pesaro, the composer's birthplace. In that work, Heine's literary character states while swans sing at the end of their life, Rossini's voice was silenced much earlier. He obviously referred to the operas, rather than to the vocal suavity of the *Soirées musicales* of 1835! Finally, we are not alone in admiring them – the full set was arranged by Liszt for solo piano, while in the mid-twentieth century several items were arranged for orchestra by both Respighi and Britten.

Soirées Musicales Quintette

presents

A Christmas Songbook

Old Government House Brisbane

7.30pm Friday 11 December and 7pm Wednesday 16 December, 2020

Program

Prelude

'Die Hirten an der Krippe' (The shepherds at the manger) based on **Franz Liszt (1811-86)**
'In dulci jubilo' - from *Der Weihnachtsbaum* (Christmas tree suite) S.186

Christmas in Germany and Austria

'Weihnachten' (Christmas) from **Johannes Brahms (1833-97)**
Volkskinderlieder (Children's folksongs) WoO 31 No.12

'Weihnachtslied' (Christmas song) from **Robert Schumann (1810-56)**
Lieder-Album für die Jugend (Songbook for the young) Op.79 No.16

'Mariä Wiegenlied' (Mary's lullaby) from **Max Reger (1873-1916)**
Schlichte Weisen (Simple tunes) Op.76 No.52

'Die Könige' (The magi) from **Peter Cornelius (1824-74)**
Weihnachtslieder (Christmas songs) Op.8 No.3

'Weihnachtsgefühl' (Christmas feeling) TrV 198 **Richard Strauss (1864-1949)**

Interlude

'Weihnachtstraum' (Christmas dream) based on 'Stille Nacht, heil'ge Nacht' from **Max Reger**
Aus der Jugendzeit (From childhood) Op.17 No.9

Christmas in Scandinavia

'Sang til juletræet' (Christmas tree song) from **Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)**
Barnlige Sange (Children's songs) Op.61 No.2

'Jo jouttu ilta' (Outside it is getting dark) from **Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)**
Fem julsånger (Five Christmas songs) Op.1 No.3

'Barn Jesus' (Baby Jesus) from **Niels Gade (1817-90)**
Børnenes Juul (Children's Christmas) Op.36 No.2

Interlude

'Jule Klokkerne' (Christmas bells) from **Niels Gade**
Børnenes Juul (Children's Christmas) Op.36 No.1

Christmas in France

'Il est né le divin enfant' (The divine child is born) arranged by **Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)**

'Cantique de Noël' (Christmas song – O holy night) **Adolphe Adam (1803-56)**

'La Nuit de Noël' – Pastorale (Song of Christmas) **Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)**

'Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus de maisons'
(Christmas carol for homeless children) **Claude Debussy (1862-1918)**

'Chantez Noël!' (Sing Merry Christmas) **Charles Gounod (1818-93)**

Interlude

'Scherzoso' – 'Lighting the candles on the Christmas tree' from **Franz Liszt**
Der Weihnachtsbaum (Christmas tree suite) S.186

Christmas in England

'When I view the Mother holding' and arranged by **John Stainer (1840-1901)**

'The shepherds went their hasty way' from *Christmas Carols Old and New*

Interlude

'Adeste fidelis' (O come, all ye faithful) – 'March of the Magi' from **Franz Liszt**
Der Weihnachtsbaum (Christmas tree suite) S.186

Christmas in America

'Little star of Bethlehem' **Charles Ives (1874-1954)**

'I wonder as I wander' arranged by **Benjamin Britten (1913-76)**

About the program

Concerts of Christmas music are usually in abundance at this time of year, though the circumstances we have been facing in 2020 have affected the location and format of many events. Whether performed in a church, school or other venue, the uplifting spirit of the season imbues the many carols and songs that one is likely to hear. While today's concert continues this tradition, it also offers something slightly different. To be sure, some well-known Christmas melodies will be heard, either in their familiar original setting or in a vocal or instrumental arrangement. We also present some music which is less familiar, but equally interesting.

A popular approach to such a program is to trace the events of the first Christmas, from the announcement of the angels to the nativity scene with the shepherds and animals, and then to the arrival of the wise men or 'magi'. Another option is to sample how diverse cultural traditions are represented in the music of the season. As implied by our program's title, *A Christmas Songbook* takes the latter approach, with a musical journey to many different countries and traditions. Appropriately, the original languages are being performed, including German, French, Danish, Norwegian, Finnish as well as English. Some of the selections are quite simple, while others are more elaborate settings. The customary messages of joy and peace feature throughout, but there are also some telling references to the effects of conflict and wartime upon the celebration of Christmas.

As an ensemble we usually perform repertoire from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in particular partsongs for mixed quartet and piano, vocal duets and song cycles. A similar variety of ensemble combinations also emerged after researching Christmas music by the major composers of this era, and not surprisingly many neglected gems have come to light. In addition to artsongs by Reger, Cornelius, Strauss, Debussy and Ives, we present some seasonal children's songs and folksongs by Brahms, Schumann, Grieg, Gade, Sibelius and Britten. A favourite French song by Adam is heard alongside some extended concert pieces by Rossini and Gounod.

An interesting theme that emerges from our selections is that the celebration of Christmas has inspired composers at all stages of their careers. For example, we sample the first set of songs published by Sibelius and also the final song composed by Debussy, written in the darkest days of World War One. Another aspect which comes into focus within our anthology is that a plain setting, which on first glance appears rather straightforward, can at the same time exhibit a high level of creative inspiration. Furthermore, some of the oldest carol or hymn melodies sometimes appear almost in disguise, as in the Reger and Cornelius songs, within a setting in which the listener's immediate attention is attracted to the newly composed vocal or piano part.

Our journey commences in the German-speaking countries, where images of the Christmas tree abound. By way of a prelude, and recurring later as interludes, several movements from Liszt's *Christmas Tree* are featured. This suite for solo piano was composed for his family by Liszt at the end of his long career, but it is rarely heard today. The long intense winters of Scandinavia have given inspiration to some poignant imagery, including that of the Christ child being the Light of the World. The pastoral simplicity of some of the French songs is contrasted with a few more overtly operatic settings, and these are in turn followed by examples of Victorian-era domestic music from the large collection published as *Christmas carols, old and new*. We complete our journey in North America, with a rather modern setting of an ancient hills song.

Carols normally comprise a simple melody that is heard clearly in a succession of stanzas, a format that is evident in several selections on this program. Set piece genres such as the shepherds' pastorale, Mary's lullaby, and the march of the Magi, which give rise to their own distinctive musical attributes, are also included. While most of the program comprises works for solo voice or piano, we also present several pieces for full quartet, or solo-refrain settings where different combinations of voices are heard. Some of the music is sure to be familiar, at least in the melodic lines, but we hope that *A Christmas Songbook* will also take you somewhere new and interesting today, as the Christmas season approaches.

Linking the musical items is a spoken narrative that is shared between the four soloists. Rather than provide extensive historical information in these printed program notes, we hope these verbal descriptions, immediately before each piece is performed, will enhance the listening experience by providing additional context. We first presented *A Christmas Songbook* several years ago, when the audience response was uniformly enthusiastic. Therefore, rather than alter our original concept, we have decided to reprise the program in full.

The fact that you, our audience, have supported us to the extent that due to popular demand a second performance became necessary, is most encouraging indeed. After a year that has been full of challenges, we wish you an enjoyable and joyful Christmas season and more poignantly, a happy and peaceful New Year.